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BLUE BOOK



AUGUST, 1938

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Except for stories of Real Experience, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

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Prize Offer for Real Experiences

THERE is material for a novel in every person's life, it has been said. Whether this is true or not, we do believe that in the lives of most of us some experience has occurred sufficiently exciting to merit description in print. With this idea in mind we shall be pleased to receive and to print true stories of real experience, running from one thousand to four thousand words each. For each of those accepted each month we will pay, according to our appraisal of its length and strength, an average price of \$50.

In theme the stories may deal with adventure, mystery, sport, humor, — especially humor!—war or business. Sex is barred. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Real Experience Editor, the Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. Preferably but not necessarily they should be typewritten, and should be accompanied by a stamped and self-addressed envelope for use in case the story is unavailable.

A pen name may be used if desired, but in all cases the writer's real name and permanent address should accompany the manuscript. Be sure to write your name and correct address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of your story, and keep a copy as insurance against loss of the original; for while we handle manuscripts with great care, we cannot accept responsibility for their return. As this is a monthly contest, from one to two months may elapse before you receive a report on your story.

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Panama

ROBERT MILL of "Tiny David" fame has spent the winter in the Canal Zone, gathering material for a group of stories about the Zone police. But what he saw so fascinated him that first he has written a short novel about another phase of the Zone—a story that will fascinate you also. He writes:

"PANAMA PERIL" is fiction. There never has been an attempt to destroy the Panama Canal. It is the hope of every right-thinking person, regardless of nationality, that such an attempt never will be made.

Yet, as a character in the story remarks, this is the era of undeclared wars. Aggressor nations strike without warning, cripple their foe, and then give attention to formal declarations of war and other diplomatic niceties.

Should the United States be chosen as the target for such an attempt, the Panama Canal, which is this nation's lifeline, would be the logical place for the enemy to strike. The methods described in this story are among the logical ones such an aggressor nation would attempt, and the technical data therein is correct.

Dangerous material to print, particularly in times such as these? No. This information, and other information perhaps much more dangerous, is in the possession of every major power in the world, just as we have—our officials probably would deny it—similar data regarding strategic points elsewhere in the world.

The agents of hostile countries who appear in the novel are creatures of fiction. This writer, as far as he knows, met only one person actively engaged in espionage for a foreign power, and that fellow, since removed from the scene, was far too heavy-handed and clumsy to be of the slightest use in fiction.

The Americans who figure in the story are characters of fiction in that they were created with no one man in mind. Each character, rather, is a composite picture of the many men of his type and calling the writer met while in Panama.

They are a colorful lot, the men who contributed to these composite pictures, and a gallant one:

Policemen, ranging in rank from patrolman to inspector. I walked their beats with them. I sat in their offices while they discussed their administrative problems. I rode their launch patrols from one end of the "Big Ditch" to the other. They took me far up the Chagres River to what they called bush, and what the rest of the world would designate as dense jungle. They showed me jungle villages that might have been stolen from a movie set. Slowing down in deference to my softness, they led me over a jungle trail that once was

Peril

trod by a colorful, lovable knave named Morgan.

They took me to their model penitentiary, and we lunched there—it was an excellent meal—with only a low rail separating us from the inmates. I went with them while they made their investigations. Later, I heard them present those same cases in court. Then, to complete the picture, they turned me over to their Panamanian co-workers who operate on the other side of what is almost a mythical line. There I fared quite as well.

They kept telling me, over and over again: "There is nothing in geography. We are just cops."

Maybe. But in a country that lies only a few degrees north of the equator, they have established and maintained American standards of efficiency. They have kept fit and active in a climate that saps the vitality of men from a more temperate land. They have adapted themselves to strange ways, strange places and strange races. Yet they have remained distinctly American. And that last is not the least of their achievements.

The composite pictures also are enriched by the men who built the Canal, maintain it, and operate it, and all of whom rejoice in the simple title, "Ditch-diggers." I sat with them in executive offices. I watched them work in control towers on the locks. I rode in their electric "mules." I stood with them on the bridges of some of the "big babies" they were "slipping through." One of them turned out of his bunk so that I could sleep aboard one of the dredges that never cease laboring in the Cut. I rode their pay-launch, and thereby acquired a working knowledge of the rich patois of the likable black men from Jamaica.

Engineer or clerk, high official or mechanic, they were much alike. They had the same pride in what they were doing, the same embarrassed affection for their Big Ditch.

Then, to complete the gallery of composite pictures, the military defenders of the Canal: Army men, from a general as approachable as a sergeant, to a private who was as cultured as any general could be. Navy men, from admiral to goby. They showed me as much of their work as the regulations permitted.

Therefore there is nothing fictional about any virtues the characters in "Panama Peril" may possess. These traits, efficiency, courage, honor and devotion to duty, have been taken from life. The men of the Canal Zone are so plentifully endowed with these qualities that the small amount portrayed in this story will not be missed. Neither will it do them justice.

Don't miss this remarkable novel, which will be published complete in our next issue.

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Illustrated by
Grattan Condon

TIRREL saluted the colonel and said in fairly good Spanish: "I'd like to take up Tommy's biplane."

The colonel was very drunk. On the white of his face wavered a spot of sunlight let in through the hole which a three-inch shell had clipped through the top of the tent the day before.

"That plane is condemned," said the colonel.

"I've worked on it for two days," said Tirrel. "It will fly now."

The colonel grew only more pale and more precise when he was drunk. That is a rare Latin gift. Now he became extremely logical, saying: "Tomlinson was your friend. Tomlinson was shot out of the sky by the enemy. It will please Tomlinson's ghost if you take his old bus into the sky and shoot something down with it."

"Something like that, I suppose," admitted Tirrel.

"You are—" declared the colonel, pausing for the proper word. "You are—an



"You beast! Can you bring Gonzales back to life?"

American. You don't realize that Don Quixote was already ridiculous three hundred years ago; and you are exactly three centuries more stale and out of date than he was."

"Yes sir," said Tirrel, vaguely, for he never knew how to argue with words.

"You think," went on the colonel, sharpening his little mustaches with his fingertips, "that though chivalry is dead on the earth, it is still alive in the air. For that reason you have followed the wars. You have flown in South America; you have flown in China; today you are flying in Spain. You send individual challenges to prominent enemy aviators. You consider yourself a knightly spirit

The Flaming Finish

A noted writer new to these pages here offers the first of a brilliant series of air adventures.

By MAX BRAND

when you encounter them in the clouds. But though you may force us to read headlines about you, you cannot keep us from laughing behind your back."

"No sir," said Tirrel gently. He put his big hands behind his back, and gripped them hard together.

"I," said the colonel, "as a Spaniard and a patriot, consider you extremely absurd and a little disgusting. But you are efficient in the air; and if you wish to commit suicide in the name of your dead friend, you shall have the plane when you please. You will note, Tirrel, that in this world every man may have what he wants, so long as his desire is foolish enough to keep him from envy. With that—*adios!*"

Tirrel wanted to do something about the colonel with his hands; so he got himself out of the tent quickly, and went over to the field where the old biplane was standing. He was very angry, but with every step he took, his passion decreased and the words of the colonel began to ring in his brain like solemn truths such as children intone from their first readers. Chivalry was dead. As a matter of fact, he never had thought of himself as a knight of the air; what he felt was quite wordless until the colonel

expressed it for him, and now he seemed limited by and bound to the words which the drunken Spaniard had spoken. In this world there was no more high adventure, and he was a fool searching through the world for ghosts. But when he saw Tommy Tomlinson's old machine, once more the great urge came over him to take the rickety bus into the air and try to do something in the name of his dead friend. They had fixed up the plane as well as they could, but the bloodstains were still visible in the cockpit. The sight of them brought the sweat out on the upper lip of Tirrel. It was a ridiculous old machine, German make, and of the 1929 vintage—sound enough for a slow excursion, but not worth a damn for tumbling about in a dog-fight.

"Is there anything around?" he asked at the field.

"There's something up there in those clouds," was the answer of the major in charge of the field.

"I'll go take a look," said Tirrel.

"Don't be a fool," said the major. "That plane handles like a ten-ton truck on a frozen road; and the little devils I saw up there were single seaters; pursuit planes that can scare three hundred miles an hour."

"I'll run if they look at me," lied Tirrel, and took the old bus off the ground.

THE clouds were white puffs such as shrapnel-bursts leave in the air, but they turned thinner and bluer and bigger when Tirrel got the old biplane up to them. As he rose, he had a perfect picture of the great city, moth-eaten here and there by bombing and shell-fire. For his own part, he had come with such a reputation for combat work that he never had had to do any bombing, for which he thanked God and his good luck; and no matter how the death-grapple went on the Spanish soil beneath, in the air he had felt that there was still something of high chivalry, and men fought duels worthy of filling the throats of poets, if only poets would begin to sing again in this darkened century.

Or else had it all been foolish tommyrot and pretense: that quiet London mansion, the portrait of noble old red-faced Dunsbury, with underneath it the benediction which he had left to the world: "*Peace in the air*"? For Lord Dunsbury had conceived the idea of an international but secret society of the greatest air-men in the world, men who would represent every air-minded nation

and meet together in the London home which he provided for them out of his great estate. It was not a public matter, but it was the greatest honor that could befall a flyer; and when Tirrel on his initiation night took the oath of that fraternity, with the great air-men of a dozen nations around him, he had been sure that knighthood was again in flower, and that in the sky he had found the wild blue fields of romance, where a day of riding is worth a life of mundane wretchedness. But now he felt that the colonel was right. And the Halcyon Club was only a bright bubble of the mind, a fiction pleasantly housed.

HE lifted his hand and touched the little golden "*H*" which he wore under the lapel of his coat. He was troubled. What had he done to keep "peace in the air"?

His mind was dimmed by that feeling. The air is not a good place for trouble to darken the eyes; and he was aware of this immediately after he entered the lowest drift of blowing clouds; for three blurred lines of speed slid out of the upper mist and turned into three monoplanes, smart as devils, that dropped at him.

He turned through a cloud no bigger than a cannon-puff of smoke, but it gave him a chance to change his angle of flight, and he came out with his nose pointing up and aslant at the last and tardiest of the enemy planes. He put a good long burst right into the heart of her, the white chasers hitting the mark as though his hand were guiding them home to the last; when he tumbled into a twisting descent, he saw that plane sag off to the side in a long swoop, like a seagull blowing down the wind. A moment later it was falling out of control.

Well, that was enough for honor. It seemed to him that the jolly face of Tommy Tomlinson looked in upon him again, and that the voice of the friendly ghost was saying: "Good boy! Now go home!"

Tirrel turned and ran for his life.

It was no good. A fat old bulldog with plenty of jaw-muscle but no legs under him against a pair of dodging, snapping terriers—it was like that, except that each of these terriers was able to bite to the heart when the right moment came. He had to hold the right amount from them. The temptation, as always, was to slide straight for the ground; but that was of course the per-

THE FLAMING FINISH

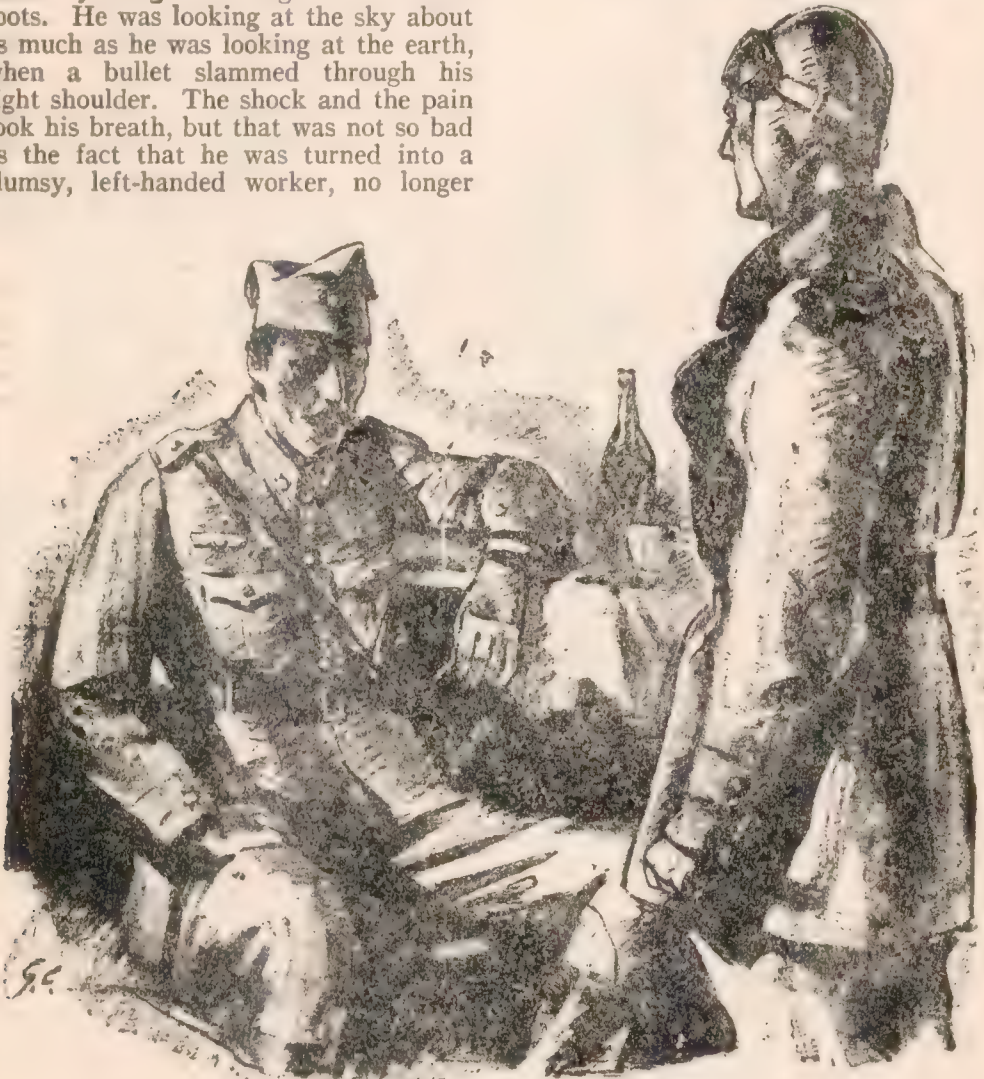
fect way to let them level off behind, and blow the target right out of the sky.

It was not the first time he had been in a dog-fight against odds. There had been a period during which he was able to challenge individual enemies, and then go up into the blue to meet them by courteous, and deadly appointment; but that time had ended after he encountered, in the flawless pure sky above Salamanca, that hero and exquisite airman Francisco Gonzales. After Gonzales went down in flames, a special order forbade any more of these romantic trysts in the sky. The two who now hounded Tirrel were not good flyers. In his single-seater he would have knocked them over with no trouble at all; but this old bus creaked in the joints with rusty age. He had to keep turning, twisting, tumbling, almost jerking the wings out at their roots. He was looking at the sky about as much as he was looking at the earth, when a bullet slammed through his right shoulder. The shock and the pain took his breath, but that was not so bad as the fact that he was turned into a clumsy, left-handed worker, no longer

able to tool the plane through the sky with the old delicate surety.

The city was far down beneath the horizon. There were ragged hills, scattering shrubbery, big raw-faced bluffs that looked like terrain of the American West as he sprawled toward the earth. Once he spilled the machine in a sort of tumbler pigeon dive, and got in a couple of bursts at the pursuers; after that, they shot the life out of his motor, and he had to swoop right down into the unexpected mercy of a squall of rain which was falling from a long, low cloud.

Under that shadowy curtain he passed and slid into a field of low, spreading shrubbery. A roaring ghost rushed over him; a burst of machine-gun fire played *ring-a-ting* on his biplane; and then a tree that lay half on the ground reached



"You think chivalry is alive in the air."



They shot the life out of his motor and he had to swoop into the mercy of a cloud.

out an unexpected arm and snagged him. The old plane flipped over on its back. He got a whang on the head, and dangled on the safety-belt like a fish from a line. As he reached for the release lever, the second monoplane zoomed over him and sprayed the dying biplane with lead. A smell of gas arose, and flames spurted. When he got out of the plane, he dived into the thick of a shrub and wallowed in it. That was how he put out the spots

of eating fire. The wet leaves and the sweeping rain helped in the good work.

Everything seemed little and unimportant, down there on the earth. The thunderhead from which the storm was streaming, the trees, the hills, even the pain in his back and shoulder scarcely mattered. All that really counted were the two planes which kept dipping out of the sky and putting bursts of machine-gun fire into the flaming plane. Their

motors to the ear were like two ragged lines of red fire to the eye, swinging down and up, writing a big sprawling message of revenge. Perhaps they were pals of that fellow he had shot down. Tirrel, watching the way they handled their buses, set his teeth a bit and breathed more deeply. He could fly left-handed better than that; he wanted to be up among them and doing things.

HE put a half-mile between him and the biplane, holding his right arm at the elbow like a package of meat. Then the pain made him sick at his stomach and kept him groveling on his knees for a while. After that he lay back and relaxed, but there was no real rest, because the pain kept running through a devilish crescendo; when he forced his brain to think of something else, all it could conceive were the highest, brittle notes on a piano, or a violin squeaking shrilly.

He had to use a pocket-knife to get himself out of his clothes. Everything was blood-soaked. When he was stripped to the waist, he tried to make a bandage, but he saw at once that to fit a bandage across his shoulder would be impossible with his single hand.

He got to his knees. He got to his feet. His legs were betraying him, as they betray a punch-drunk prizefighter; and the blood kept running down his back and his breast. The wound in front, where the bullet had issued, was much the worse. He gave over supporting his right arm, merely stuffing the hand inside his belt. That left his other hand free to comfort the bleeding mouth of the wound.

The day, too, was unfriendly, for instead of blowing away, the storm had spread over the entire sky, bringing on an early twilight. He oriented himself. He might have twenty miles of hell to walk through. He might have only five. If there were only five, he could make it, possibly. So he walked on until his knees let him down in a mud-puddle, and he had to use up nearly all his strength before he was out of it. Another fit of nausea wrung out his insides like wet rubber.

Even then his heart did not leave him entirely. The soul went out of him only when he managed to get to his feet again, and saw a little yellow eye of light shining from a hovel not far away. Reason kept telling him these peasants were apt merely to stick him in the throat as they might slaughter a swine;

but beyond the voice of reason there was the cry of his body for a bed and something other than ditch-water to drink.

He went toward the light.

The moon came blinking through the wash of clouds, though rain still was falling, and it gave him light enough to see that the hut stood at the foot of a high place on which the ruins of a castle stuck broken fingers into the sky. No doubt in the lost centuries a little village had huddled around the feet of the castle to serve the will of its master; but of the village only one hovel remained, and the masonry of the castle had spilled down the sharp slope in tumbled masses. The ponderous key-stone of an arch lay at the very side of the muddy road, and on it was carved a coat of arms that startled Tirrel like a familiar face. Somewhere in his past he had seen the lions rampant and the winged serpent subdued between them; somewhere he had read the Latin motto, which seemed to make little sense as a caption for the picture. "*Timidus Plutus.*" Which was to say: "Plutus (wealth) is full of fear."

He turned from that problem of memory and went toward the small yellow light again until his bowed head struck against a wall.

By fumbling, he found the door and pushed at it until it was jerked open suddenly. A big bowlegged peasant with a hairy face as round as the head of an owl confronted him.

"Ah?" he said. And reaching out, he took Tirrel by the hair of the head and pulled him inside. Tirrel fell on his knees. He would have fallen on his face, except that the strong hand held him up.

"Look, Mamá," said the peasant, and shook Tirrel's head.

A WOMAN sat in the corner between the bed and stove, sewing with an awl and a bit of scrubby leather to put a patch on the side of a shoe. She stuck the awl into a wall-crevice, leaving the shoe hanging while she got up and went to Tirrel. She had greasy black hair, and her face was dark, as though some of the stain from her clothes had rubbed off on her skin; the neck was darker than the face. She leaned over Tirrel and pushed a forefinger at the wound. She drew the finger back, looked at the blood, and wiped it off in the palm of the other hand.

"But this!" said the peasant, and tapped his sandal against the leather

puttees. "Air! Air! He's one of them out of the air."

Tirrel got to his feet. He could see the strong foretaste of his death working in their faces. They had plenty of tools for slaughter, from the short-handled double-bitted axe in the corner to the butcher knife stuck into a chunk of bread like a pin into a pincushion.

"I can send for money," said Tirrel. He tried to make a gesture to indicate a great sum, but the peasant caught him by the wrist and squeezed the life out of his hand. "A great deal of money," went on Tirrel, feeling his way through the strange language, "—it will make you—"

"Mamá," said the peasant, "he can send for money. Do you want his money? He has plenty of it."

"You beast!" screamed Mamá. "You have plenty of money, have you? But how much blood is left in you? Can you bring Gonzales back to life? Can you take our Pedro out of the air where you've been hawking at him? Oh, my God! José, stand away from him; let me use my hands on him—"

"Hush, Mamá! Hush, hush!" said José, with a sort of husky sweetness in his voice. "We must think about it. We must find the best way. If this were a chicken, now, we could scald off the feathers before we wring the neck. And even with a man, there are some pretty things we could do for him. But Pedro may be home tonight, and he is sure to have ideas."

"Pedro? He will never get home tonight," said Mamá. "This beast probably has killed him today in the air!" She was weeping and screaming out the words at the same time, until her throat filled, and she struck Tirrel with her fist, not as a man strikes with the knuckles, but as a smith hammers on an anvil. There was weight enough in the blow to knock Tirrel out of the grasp of José and fell him to the floor. His full weight whacked against the rearward bullet-wound, and set a burning tree of agony blossoming through his brain.

JOSÉ picked him up and laid him on the bed.

He was saying: "Gently, Mamá. There isn't much life left in him, and we must treat him like a baby. We must give him milk and wine and keep him strong, or else he will die at a touch."

They tried in fact put pads over the mouths of the wound and tie them in place with a string harness. Afterward,

Tirrel found his head being lifted. A smell stronger than old garlic entered his nostrils. It was Mamá who raised him so that he could drink the soup which José held at his lips. Then they lowered his head again.

"Thank you, friends," whispered Tirrel.

"He thanks us, Mamá," said José, and laughed.

THE pain began to go to sleep as though there had been a strong drug in the food. Tirrel closed his eyes, and saw the little Ohio town white with winter and brilliant with yellow lights by night. For three years it had been no more than a pin-point on his map; but now it filled half the horizon of his world. Time went slowly by him. He opened his eyes, and in the grinning, speculative face of José he read again all the fictions of Inquisitional tortures that had frightened his boyhood. Mamá, on her knees under the wall-niche where the saint was standing, prayed loudly and rapidly for the safe return of Pedro, a gush, a bursting torrent of words.

"Shut up, Mamá!" shouted José suddenly.

He jerked the door open and ran out into the night. The smell and the softly pattering sound of the rain entered the hut. A whistle, and then a shout from the distance set Mamá screeching with joy. A moment later a sour-faced young Spaniard with the air insignia on his coat came into the room. Both his mother and father were explaining the stranger, and pointing him out.

Pedro came over to the bed and looked down steadily into the face of Tirrel.

"Speak!" he commanded.

"What shall I say to you, señor?" asked Tirrel.

Pedro turned on his heel.

"An American," he said.

"Why should we not do to him what he has done to us?" asked José.

"Why? In God's name, why?" asked Pedro. "There is no reason."

"Señor," said Tirrel, "I have tried to speak about money, and to suggest—"

Pedro, in the act of taking off his cap, slashed Tirrel back and forth across the face with the wet cloth.

"Money?" said Pedro. "Filthy beast!"

"Will money buy back Gonzales?" asked Mamá, whimpering.

"Yes," said Pedro softly, "Gonzales—Gonzales is dead. Tell me, Señor the American, what you—"

Pedro came over and looked down into the face of Tirrel. "Speak!" he commanded. "What shall I say to you, señor?" asked Tirrel.



But here he broke off his words, staring down at the breast of Tirrel. For the wet cap had struck away most of the thin mask of mud and blood, and in flicking over the lapel of the coat, it had exposed the little golden "H."

"Get the cart and throw some hay into it," said Pedro.

"Why the cart? And why should I be your servant?" demanded the father.

Pedro turned his eyes slowly from Tirrel and looked at his parents in such a way that the mother exclaimed: "Come, come, José! He has a thought!"

José still lingered for a moment, but the authority of his years seemed to shrink away before the new dignity of his son, for some of the grim majesty of war itself seemed to cling to the starved body of Pedro. So José allowed his wife to pull him out of the room; and presently Tirrel could hear the pair of them cursing the mule in the adjoining leanto.

In the meantime, with a heartsick anxiety, he watched the son of the house

go to the fireplace and swing out on the iron crane a large iron pot. He took a big spoon and commenced to rake up from the pot steaming beans, which had simmered and stewed almost to blackness. Pedro crouched on his heels and munched steadily on the beans until he heard the wheels of the cart creaking outside the house. Then he went to a gallon jug, lifted it, and supped noisily of the pink wine which it contained.

"AND now?" asked José, coming in with his wife, both faintly bedewed by the rain.

"Help me with him," said Pedro, taking Tirrel under the armpits. The mother obediently seized on the legs of Tirrel beneath the knees, but José, standing back beside the door, kept crying out: "Why take him away? There's light enough to see him, here, and room enough to do what we want with him."

But the other two carried Tirrel out of the garlic-stained air of the hovel and

into the open, where the cool of the rain began to touch his hot face with a thousand delicate fingers. He was lifted over a huge cartwheel whose rim was clotted with mud, and so lowered into the hay which filled the cart.

"I'll be back before morning," said Pedro, settling down in the driver's seat and picking up the reins.

"*Ah hai!* Pedro! Are you crazy?" shouted José. "Do you think you can take him away and have him all to yourself?"

For an answer, Pedro cracked the whip; the mule started with a jump, and the cart went thumping and groaning down the road. José followed a few paces, cursing, but presently he gave up the pursuit, and Tirrel saw the two squat figures standing in the dim wedge of light that spread from the door of the hut.

AFTER that, time was multiplied for Tirrel a thousandfold by pain. The ascents were comparatively peaceful, but the jolting on the downward slopes put teeth in his wounds and bit him to the bone. But he knew that this Pedro and whatever companions Pedro was taking him to, could invent torments to make the present moment seem nothing at all.

His universe turned into waves of red pain and black unconsciousness, with a few open-eyed moments in between, when he was aware of the cool mercy of the rain. In one of those moments he determined to attack Pedro, rather than lie there waiting to be carried to his death; but when he tried to sit up, a shuddering weakness made him sink back again, and he lost his senses through a long interval.

When he regained them, a hand was shaking his foot, and the voice of Pedro was saying: "Wake up! Wake up! We have come to the place."

"To what place?" asked Tirrel.

"Where should I take you, except back to your lines, my captain?" asked Pedro. "Here are the reins. Drive on down the hill until the lights shine on you. Cry out, then, and friends will come to you."

Tirrel, lifting his head, could in fact see the dim lights near at hand. The rain had ceased, leaving his body clammy with cold, and a thin moon was now pouring light on the broken clouds of the storm.

"Pedro—my friend!" cried Tirrel; and the very air he breathed changed, suddenly, and gave him the strength of hope.

"Friend?" said Pedro. "If God is kind to me, one day He will put a knife in my hand and show me a way to your throat with it! But in the name of Señor Don Francisco Ortego Gonzales, I give you back your life today, as he would have given it."

"Gonzales? Francisco Gonzales?" repeated Tirrel faintly. "Was he the man who challenged me to fight in the air over Salamanca?"

"He was our señor; he was our friend; he was our god!" said Pedro. "And after you killed him at Salamanca, in a newspaper I found your picture and kept it with me, so that I could know your face one day in this war, or after it. But tonight, tonight when I saw your face at last, I also saw on you the golden letter which he also wore—"

"Oh, my God!" cried Tirrel. "Do you mean that he wore a golden 'H' like this?"

Pedro began to weep aloud, words coming singly through the sobbing: "Tonight I thought you were given into my hands by God, and I could have broken your body like old bread. Then I saw the letter that was sacred to my señor. And I understood what Don Francisco would have done for you. In *my* name I promise to find you again, one day; but in *his* name, with his dead hands—Oh, God! I give you back your life. . . . *Ah hai!* Bella! Get on!"

THE mule lurched forward with the cart down the slope until sudden loud voices shouted near Tirrel; the cart was stopped, and soldiers began to climb into it. But Tirrel for a moment looked up with uncomprehending eyes toward the thunder-forms of the clouds, and the moon which kept a small bright heaven among them. He was remembering, at last, where he had seen the coat of arms that showed the rampant lions and the winged serpent, and the motto: "*Timidus Plutus.*" He had seen it on the keystone beneath the castle ruins, and he had seen it before in the same newspaper which described the death of that fearless Spanish knight of the air, Francisco Ortega Gonzales.

A ruinous sense of loss blew like a wind through the soul of Tirrel, and he felt alone in the world. It seemed to him that the voice of old Dunsbury lived again, saying: "*Peace in the air!*" And a new resolution grew up in him as silently as a tree grows, and striking as deep a root.

Another memorable story by Max Brand is scheduled for the next, the September, issue.



"Gun stations,
and stand by!"

Flying Dutchman

"Ships and Men"—No. XX

By H. BEDFORD-JONES
and CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

WE were talking about the Flying Dutchman, three or four of us, in the Seamen's Institute, which overlooks the wharves and the East River, across to Brooklyn. It started with an old woodcut of the caravel, the ship that served Columbus and Vasco da Gama.

Cap'n Frazier, stroking his long white whiskers, declared she looked like a sea-going wooden shoe with a chicken coop perched on the stern.

Billings, the Cunarder chief steward, stuck up for her lines, however, and the old skipper nodded judicially.



"Your destiny lies with me!"

"In a way, yes. No other type of ship is so peculiarly charged with the poetry of the sea, with that weird and grotesque quality which, by moonlight or day distance, comes so near to perfect beauty. We couldn't possibly manufacture the Flying Dutchman out of anything that was launched in the Nineteenth Century."

"Ever see her, Frazier?" asked somebody. "Ever see Vanderdecken?"

Frazier, who looked like Vanderdecken himself, grunted harshly.

"Don't be absurd. Nobody's ever seen that ship. It's just a myth—one of those things that can't be explained."

"It can be explained," said Billings quietly.

Like many of these Cunarders, Billings had a lot of war decorations, a thirst, and a hard practical eye. There was a burst of laughter at his statement, which no one took seriously. Talk of the Flying Dutchman filled the air for a space.

Vanderdecken. . . . Accursed. Doomed to an eternity of sailing, forever baffled by gales and head-winds that kept him from rounding the Cape, never to know peace or security; and all because of a burst of profanity when the elements perversely turned against him.

There'd be many another like Vanderdecken if profanity could do it, said somebody; and we all laughed. Old Frazier, on occasion, could blast forth a salvo of salt-water language fit to curl the very rope-ends.

Vanderdecken. . . . Never beating to the northward of 34° South, but eternally there, and visible of misty moonlit nights, or the specter of his ship gliding along under a driving wind and fog. A fabric with high, stairlike poop, a shape flying over mountainous seas, leaping from some ghostly foam-squall, dissolving again like a flash from the swelling spray under her bluff bows.

"Bosh!" snorted old Cap'n Frazier. "She's never been actually seen."

"She has," said Billings in his quiet way. Frazier ignored him.

"Her type of ship did great things—discovered America, discovered the Indies, or rather opened up the road to 'em. Little ships, we'd call 'em; maybe some o' you saw the model that lay so long in the Chicago lagoons? Aye; but big, back in them days. Slow and steady. Built to take battering seas for months on end, and to be pulled up somewhere on shore and careened, and scraped clean. Hand-made, you bet. Not machine-made like these blasted craft—"

And he let loose a broadside of censure anent modern shipbuilding.

"DID you ever hear," Billings asked, "of 'The Vision of Captain Webb'? An old book published about 1680? . . . No? Well, you've missed something. It was taken to be a lie at the time, but it was true as Gospel. Cap'n Webb saw Vanderdecken, in a way. His yarn explains how others have seen him. It explains Vanderdecken entirely."

"Stuff and nonsense," sniffed old Frazier. "You can't explain away a myth."

"I'm talking about Vanderdecken, not a myth."

"Do you have the gall to claim that yarn is actually true?"

Billings gestured with his pipe.

"True, in a way, yes, like any other product of the human brain, from logarithms to deep-sea soundings. You'd have a devil of a time proving they exist; but there they are, just the same. Would you care to have me give you Cap'n Webb's yarn? I know it pretty well by heart. . . . I suppose you've heard of Saldanha Bay?"

Everyone had heard of that spot, or had been there. Not so far from the Cape; it was and still is an excellent haven for ships requiring repairs, water or re-victualing. Wild cattle and goats range the granite hills above the bay, and there is good water. From the earliest times, this was the halting-place of the

English bound for India, as it had been of the Dutchmen before them.

Captain Webb of the *Sussex*, outward bound on the long voyage for the East India establishments in the year 1665, was more than glad to drop his hook in the bay. Half his men were down with scurvy, and his water had gone bad. A stout, hardy man was John Webb, and thankful to find no other ship in the bay, and no Dutchmen here either.

He had crept to rest with the sunset, and dawn came up misty, with promise of squall and fog. Wind and fog together were no strange thing in these parts on the tip of Africa, and when Webb came on deck, he was thankful to be berthed snugly.

"Cattle, aye!" After scrutinizing the shore, he handed his glass to Hopkins, the mate. "Look at the fresh meat for the having! We'll have to trade with the blacks, o' course. There's a cairn up on the shore; that'll be letters from some other ships; if by the grace o' God they've left some fruit and greens, we'll round the Cape happy."

"If we don't meet head winds," growled the mate, "or anything worse—Lor' love us all, sir! Look at her! *Look at her!*"

Webb snatched the glass from him and focused it. Sure enough, the dim object enveloped by the opaque vapors was the outline of a ship. Something queer about the vessel, something ghastly strange; but Webb did not wait to see further. He sent a sharp bark along the deck.

"Gunner! Cast loose and provide. All hands! Gun-stations, and stand by!"

The mate, squinting through the swirls of fog, shook his head.

"Look again, sir. Better belay; she's harmless as a toothless hag. Has a look of the derelict to me—look there, how she yaws wi' the wind!"

CAPTAIN WEBB took another look. He was not the man to strike fire at the sight of a strange ship; but he had a heavy lading and was responsible for it. A thrill shot through him as he examined that ghostly ship. Her sails were untrimmed, untended. She had a queer uncanny look about her. But her ports were triced up, and he could take no chances.

"Out tampions!" rang his order, as the men thudded along the deck. "Shot the guns, light your matches."

A growl came from Hopkins. The two of them stood staring. Instead of making in for the anchorage, the stranger was

standing dead toward a reef, plainly visible under her bluff larboard bow.

"The fool! Is he daft?" exclaimed Webb, startled. "Look at that rig—look at the lines of her!"

"Out o' control and adrift," commented Hopkins.

The sea was like oiled lead; the fog was lightly drifting, the sky unbroken gray. Any seaman could sense wind and squalls coming down. Indeed, clouds of uneasy seafowl were wheeling about as though in warning; and Webb noted the sinister nimbus bank whose sudden appearance at the Cape always presaged a storm of great violence.

THE strange ship showed no colors or signals, indicated no life aboard. There would be sun, as the east indicated, and there would be wind, as all else indicated; but now there was nothing except a light air and coastal currents. Webb took the glass again, trying to pierce the vapors that furred the stranger. His eyes narrowed abruptly as he stared.

"By the Lord Harry, a Dutchman!" he muttered. "An old, old ship—look at that crazy rig! Look at that poop! One o' them old caravels."

As a powder-monkey under Blake in '53, when the doughty Tromp had swept the English from the seas, John Webb had learned to hate Dutchmen. And now the vicious trade war in these seas and farther east had increased and embittered the feeling. The Flemings, as English seamen termed these cross-Channel neighbors, had pride of their own, gave blow for blow, and had something of a monopoly on the spice trade.

"She'll be stranded in less'n half a glass," said Hopkins, dourly gloating. The seaman in him, however, fetched a frown. "Blast it! Why don't she luff? Current's taking her, more'n the air."

"Bo'sun!" Webb's voice barked again. "Rig out the longboat!" He turned to the mate. "I'll get a brace o' pistols and lay aboard her. She's been long off soundings, by her look. Keep matches alight, and a sharp eye on her, Hopkins."

He went below, presently coming on deck again with pistols in a sling. The mist was by this time thinning overhead, but the eerie vapor persistently clung to the other ship. A strange chill seemed to accompany her into the harbor. Hopkins, eying her through the glass, growled oaths beneath his breath. Uneasiness lay upon him and upon all the men, watching that queer old ship.

Webb clambered down into the longboat. "Way together!" he commanded. The crew dipped oars and lay back. Webb, at the tiller, stared fixedly at the growing shape ahead. It was brighter now, and the light airs had freshened.

"Oars!" he snapped suddenly. The men stopped pulling and glanced over their shoulders, startled by what they read in Webb's face.

For without warning, without a soul appearing aboard her to haul on tack or sheet, the strange ship luffed. She went into stays, then sluggishly came about on the larboard tack, and slowly forged away from the threatening reef. Either she had worked herself around by sheer luck, or else men were concealed behind her bulwarks in ambush.

THE first lances of the sun began to pierce the haze enveloping the ship. A mutter broke from Webb's lips; "A Hollander of a hundred years ago, or I'm a Fleming myself!" She was a queer, stubby craft of caravel build, with a triple slanting poop, short 'midships, and a long upcurving beak. The seamen began to mutter.

A derelict? Apparently; and Webb's eyes grew bright at the thought. Here along the tip of Africa ships had disappeared by the dozen, Portuguese and Dutch and English, driven ashore or foundering—ships laden with all the wealth of Ind. Many a ship had been picked up adrift, with no human soul aboard, her decks abandoned to seafowl.

"Give way!" barked Webb, and the men obeyed.

The longer he watched the Dutchman, the more singular appeared her maneuvers. She seemed unable to decide whether to come into the light or run to sea again. A look astern showed him that Hopkins was heaving short and making sail. A signal burst from the monkey-gaff of the *Sussex*; the mate was following with the ship. Webb smiled grimly.

The freshening air was now filling the tattered canvas of the old hulk, and she was heading for the open sea; but the longboat was overhauling her. On this closer approach Webb, studying her, had a glimpse of her open ports; some triced up, some sagging crazily. He could swear that he saw faces there through the wisps of fog. A thrill of superstitious fear ran icy fingers down his spine, and the hair on his neck uplifted.

For an instant he thought of turning about and regaining the ship, but he

could envision the sardonic grin of Hopkins, and set his hard jaw stubbornly.

Within hailing distance now, Webb let out a roar. He had no response whatever. The uncanny silence of the derelict was heartening, for it tokened that she was indeed a derelict. Her appearance fascinated Webb.

Now he could see the reason for her peculiar fuzzy look from a distance. It was due to nothing save long neglect. The spars, cordage, a great part of her bulwarks, were rotted and green from a total lack of scraping or tar-brush. The grotesque tops, extra large in all ships of her period, were sagging gloomily, and the rope nets that railed them were in ribbons.

Battered and moldy, the queer castelated forecandle seemed caving in from sheer decay, and was white with the rime of countless boarding combers. Toward the high stern with its three superimposed quarter galleries, everything was covered with sea-moss; the broken carved work was a roost for row upon row of solemn white noddies. And what was worse,—what was fearful to see in its ghastly incredibility,—plants and creepers were actually growing out of her, here and there.

In the water alongside, as Webb steered to make her low waist, appeared monster trailing weed; and her scarred, moss-grown planks showed monster barnacles. Although he eyed the portholes sharply, no more faces appeared there. Some of her cannon were in place, but lashed fast and closed with tampions. Others were clear gone. He hailed again, and received no answer.

"She's a drifting hulk, lads," he said to hearten the straining-eyed oarsmen. "And ours for the taking."

The men made no response. They were frightened.

Webb looked up, as the boat drew under her counter, and quick chill gripped him. There, peering over her rail, was a face. A white-bearded, clay-hued face, the eyes looking glassily down at him. It vanished so abruptly that he wondered if he had imagined it, and quickly let out another hail. No answer.

Over her side lay a crazy gangway, lashed fast; a gangway of rotting old boards and cross-pieces made of sticks with the bark on. The bowman hooked fast. Webb beckoned to the stroke.

"Take the tiller." His gruff tones sounded flat and forced. He did not half like this business himself. "If I'm not

back in five minutes and you hear nothing from me, pull for the ship and tell Master Hopkins to lay her aboard."

He scrambled up the shaky gangway, which fell to pieces under his weight, flung himself across the bulwarks, and was on the deck of the Dutchman.

He stood blinking, all astare. A deck with gaping holes, a deck that sprouted green things; woodwork molded and mossy, cannon actually green with verdigris, everything in sight rotten and decayed.

"Ahoy below!" he called. "Anyone aboard here?"

"Who be you?" came a quavering voice. "Be you pirates?"

"Pirates? Lord love you! Cap'n Webb of the *Sussex*."

A murmur of voices. Then a queer old figure appeared, clad in rags and tatters, a figure white-bearded, skinny, peering at him.

"We be all Dutch but me, master," said the apparition. "What's left o' two hundred souls cast ashore fifteen year ago. We found this old hulk on a reef and put her in shape—"

"He's lying to you!" burst out a roaring, bellowing voice. A huge gaunt man came from aft, a man who was a veritable giant, with shaggy white hair and a massive white beard. His voice lifted again, in mingled Dutch and English. "I'm master here, Vanderdecken by name. Here, everybody! Seize this accursed Englishman!"

WEBB first thought that he was dealing with a madman; but he changed his mind about that. Out on deck, from aft and forward, poured some forty scarecrow shapes—withered, sea-twisted old men, most of them, armed with everything from belaying pins to rusted pikes.

"Overboard with this Englishman!" roared the giant Vanderdecken. "He's an enemy; we're at war with his country—"

"You fool, we haven't been at war with Holland for a generation!" broke out Webb. "Listen to me, you pack of old nitwits!" He shouted in Dutch, which he spoke fluently. "I came aboard to do you a service, not to harm you. There's my ship yonder; and if ye do me any hurt, she'll lay you aboard!"

He might as well have shouted at the wind. The pack of old scarecrows, mewling and cawing like a flock of enraged gulls about a scavenger shark, closed in



with a rush. Webb backed away, lashing out with heavy fists as they bore down upon him, but their attack was sudden and sweeping. A skinny claw whipped in under his gullet, and as he staggered, something crashed on his head from behind. He caught at the moldy rail, then sagged to the deck as they closed over him. The last thing he heard was that wild frenzied voice of Vanderdecken:

"Overboard with him! *Overboard!*"

When Webb returned to consciousness, he was sitting in a huge straight-backed chair at the head of an enormous carved table; it was bolted to the deck in the center of a triangular cabin. Some dingy oil portraits and tatters of tapestry decked the paneled walls. Overhead guttered a storm-lantern, whose spirals of acrid smoke mingled with the overburdened air of the closed cabin.

Webb looked down at himself, flexed his bruised knuckles, looked up. Opposite, at the other end of the table, grimly eying him, and puffing at a pipe, was the giant Vanderdecken. Above his patriarchal beard were parchmenty features. The broad, bony forehead was indented by skeleton sockets from which gleamed



"Aloow there on deck!" Webb's voice cried. "Take in all light sails—jump!" The glib-bering bearded shapes sprang to work with amazing agility.

the man's blue eyes. Wild eyes, yes, but dreadfully sane.

"So, you are awake! And now your destiny lies with Vanderdecken," said this gaunt specter.

Vanderdecken! The name smote into Webb with sudden significance. A sudden chill of superstitious fear assailed him. He remembered seamen's wild yarns about this Flying Dutchman, as they called him—the Vanderdecken who, for his tremendous profanity, was supposedly condemned to spend eternity beating about the Cape. Many a seaman swore to having seen his ghostly ship scudding in storm. Until this moment, Webb had not recalled the fantastic stories, current in shipping circles during the past sixty years.

"Destiny?" he exclaimed frowningly. "What fool's talk is this?"

Vanderdecken grinned at him, puffing at his pipe. Webb went on hotly:

"You ordered your mummy crew to heave me overboard. What am I doing here in your cabin? This is a fine return, for coming aboard to offer assistance!"

"Assistance!" Astonishingly, the bearded giant became solemn, sober, gravely intent. "Aye. You've said it yourself. Assistance! So the Lord has relented at last, after the weary years I've waited. Today you pilot me around the Cape, master Englishman. And then the curse is lifted."

"Vanderdecken—bah!" exploded Webb. "That fellow's just a legend, he and his blasted curse—"

"And Vanderdecken I am!" The old man lifted a skinny hand and pointed. "Captain Vanderdecken, bound for the Ind and the Moluccas, bound to get there despite hell or heaven! Now that you've offered your assistance, the curse is lifted."

"Be damned to you!" flamed out Webb angrily. "I've offered no such assistance. You're mad as a March hare!"

HIS superstition was crushed now. Here was no specter after all, but an old demented shipmaster who imagined things. Blown south of his reckoning, perhaps shipwrecked along the coast and picking up an old hulk, just as that doddering Englishman had told him; and this old giant with the ghastly claw simply was gone daft. Nothing else for it—unless he were indeed Vanderdecken.

Webb shivered a little at this thought. He caught a thin, high moaning sound,

and started up in alarm. Wind, by heavens!

"Mad, am I?" roared Vanderdecken, and ripped out a blast of oaths that startled the listener. "Hark'ee—I'll beat around. In spite of the devil, high water, all the head-winds in creation, I'll beat around! And you'll pilot me, you Englishman! Mad, eh? I'll show you how sane I am."

He leaned forward, and again shook that pallid claw at Webb.

"SHOW me what's new in seamanship, Englishman! In these past years, there's been many an improvement in ships and sailing, in knowledge of currents and winds and of the coast itself, and the Cape. Many's the ship I've followed, trying to watch the cut and handling of her canvas. Many's the ship I've spoken, trying to get a pilot. Thirty years ago one came aboard, but dropped dead as he stepped over the rail. Always failure, failure! But now you've offered assistance, and I'll hold you to it. You'll give me your skill and knowledge. You'll pilot me, master, you'll pilot me!"

"Be damned if I do!" shot out the furious Webb. "Either I'm out of my head, or you are. But my own ship lies waiting, and devil fly away with me if—"

His hot-tumbling words were cut short. The smoky cabin reeled; the lantern swayed wildly on creaking gimbals; and Vanderdecken's pipe went crashing to the deck. So did Vanderdecken, with Webb almost on top of him. The ancient tub heeled nearly on her beam ends, under a hissing onrush of wind and water.

Slowly, while the storm-racked ancient timbers groaned and creaked, the ship righted herself. Webb was frightened now, actually in panic. He no longer doubted that this white-haired giant was really Vanderdecken.

"The storm! The unending storm!" boomed out the gaunt Dutchman, as he staggered up. "On deck, Englishman! Show me your skill now, for the curse is lifted!"

He caught Webb by the arms and propelled him. The master of the *Sussex* struggled, but was like a child in the grip of those huge bony hands. Cold as ice they seemed, even through his stout woollens, cold as the fear in his heart.

Presently Webb found himself shoved out on the lower of the stairlike poops, while the ship listed over, buffeted by a gale the like of which he had never before encountered, even off the Cape. The



morning had darkened, the sky blackened; the air was almost like night. To his appalled gaze, his own ship had vanished, and so had the bay and the shore and the hills—everything.

From the deck before him came a moaning and screaming that froze his heart. The old scarecrow seamen were howling in thin voices:

"The curse is upon us! The wrath of God again—"

"All hands!" roared Vanderdecken. "Here, Englishman—take charge!"

Webb did so, his voice ringing down the decks, and the blaring boom of the Dutchman seconding his orders. Vanderdecken stood erect, fearless, beard flying like wild mares'-tails. From the ominous black clouds ripped out a blue-white streak of lightning. Webb had a frightful vision of those gnarled, dead-faced old men scuttling about like crippled crabs amongst a tangle of running gear, hauling frantically on tacks, sheets and brails, struggling to trim ragged sails to the whooping gale, while spume burst high in a cloud above the ship of the dead.

Vanderdecken volleyed a sudden storm of oaths. To Webb's astounded wonder, the wind perversely veered about, and with a wild shriek swung to dead ahead. Another thin, terrible lament rose from the old men. In a lingering lightning-flare, Webb caught a glint of rolling, accusing eyes cast on Vanderdecken. A sail blew from its bolt-ropes with a tremendous report. Vanderdecken, staggering

to the poop rail, flung skinny arms aloft, fists shaking, and from his bearded lips volleyed a torrent of blasphemy.

Lightning ripped and cracked. Webb was certain the bolt had hit the crumbling forecastle; he could smell the sulphur, could feel the old ship reel and shudder to the crash. It was like a reply to Vanderdecken's frightful oaths. Again the wind lifted and veered. The ship buried her beak under tons of black water. Sails slatted; blocks screamed as in mortal agony; and rigging thrummed like the strings of a giant harp.

Cursing the crazy Dutchman, his own luck, and the scene around, John Webb hurled himself at the wraithlike old men. Whether corpses or specters, he got them to work with his furious energy. Men swung on the tiller; others fell to on the lines. The slow old tub paid off, filled, and forged ahead. The wind died out. Almost instantly, it came sweeping and howling down—from dead ahead.

In vain Webb tried to tell himself that this was no more than the furious winds of the vicinity always did; he could not repress the superstitious panic that seized on him. Then came reality, with a bellow from Vanderdecken, another lightning-flash that cracked open the whole heavens, and sight of his own ship barely a cable's-length away. She was ploughing along under treble-reefed main topsail and fore t'gallant. She was real; she was tangible; and a load dropped from his soul. She must have left the shelter of the bay, and have been caught in this wild erratic blow.

"THERE sails a ship!" blared out Vanderdecken. "There sails a ship around the Cape! Follow her, Englishman. Watch her, follow her!"

Webb sent the old bearded ghosts to the maze of ropes leading aloft. The gale was increasing in violence. Rain began to lash down in sheets, and there was no standing against the wind—though Vanderdecken stood against it. Webb took shelter under the weather bulwarks, and after a moment fisted on to a backstay. He knew what was needed to bring order out of this chaos. Sight of his own ship had stabilized him, given him new heart.

"Alow there on deck!" Webb's voice carried. "Take in all light sails—jump! Brail in the lateen—lower tops'l yards! Brace in lower yards!"

The gibbering bearded shapes stared at him, then moved obediently, sprang to work with amazing agility. The tattered,

rotten canvas, what remained of it, was got in and the yards were braced.

"Helm, there!" Webb yelled to the men at the helm, who were heaving in and checking the relieving tackles, as the old ship yawed and plunged. "Put it up—helm up! We'll bring the wind around and take it over our quarter—"

Sluggishly, the caravel went around. The wind came roaring over the starboard quarter, and Vanderdecken, with a ghastly grin on his face, clapped Webb on the shoulder.

"Well done, Cap'n! We'll beat around in spite of hell and the devil— Ho!"

The words were cut off by a thunder-peal. Again the wild lamenting shriek went up from the seamen, as the wind swooped and hauled again, and roared down from dead ahead. Again the sails were aback, tautened to the bursting point. Vanderdecken, shaking his fist at the sky, stood at the rail, raving curses.

A terrific lightning-bolt ripped down. The heavens were split in a blaze of light—light that endured steadily, in a blinding glare. Webb felt the ship shake and shiver, felt her reel and go heeling as an enormous comber swept her in a thundering deluge of spray—felt himself caught up and carried over, washed clear of her deck, felt the strangling gag of the salt water as he went down and down.

Webb opened his eyes. The glare, indeed; the glare of sunlight now. He was retching the salt water out of his system, as two of the seamen held him in the longboat. He sat up, all astare, like a man gone daft. He was in the longboat, yes. The sun had come out, scattering the fog. There was no storm whatever.

His dilated eyes fastened on the Dutch derelict. She was running away down the wind, away into the fog that ran with her. The *Sussex* was back there in the bay, the signal still flying from her monkey-gaff. Webb knuckled the salt water out of his eyes and blinked at the seamen around.

"WHAT is it, lads—what happened?" he blurted, trying to wrench himself back to where he actually and undeniably was. "The storm—"

"You got a crack over the head, master," said one of the men. "A big fellow came to the rail and threw you over. A man with a long white beard, he was. We hauled you into the boat—that's all."

Webb, warming to the sunlight, tried to get the kinks out of his tangled brain.

That's all—aye! And that was all. There was no storm, never had been any. When he struck the water, it had brought him to life. The men had hauled him in. Gradually the wonder of it, the comprehension of it, grew upon him.

All that had happened aboard that spectral Dutchman, everything he had witnessed and heard and done, had occurred in his own brain. And all of it, within the spanking moment of time when he was picked up and dropped over the side.

This was the sober truth; yet to believe this truth, was a rank impossibility.

SUCH was the yarn that Billings of the Cunard outfit told us, as we sat listening to him in the Seamen's Institute. He sucked at his pipe and concluded it, solemnly:

"Poor Webb never did get the right of it through his head. He published his story and elaborated on it a bit, with details I've passed over. He was called a fool and a liar for his pains, and lost his master's berth, and went out with some other ship—Lancaster's squadron, I think—that was never heard of again."

Old Cap'n Frazier pawed his long white whiskers, and snorted thoughtfully.

"There's something to it," he pronounced. "Aye, there's a lot to it! Like the life we can live over in a flash of drowning, or the hours and days that can pass in thirty seconds of a dream!"

"Well, just what was that Dutch ship, then?" asked somebody curiously. "There was a fairly logical explanation of her, until the supposed Vanderdecken appeared!"

Billings shook his head, and glanced around with that hard, practical eye of his.

"Supposed Vanderdecken?" he repeated. "No, mates; that was the real Vanderdecken, and his ship was the real Flying Dutchman—my word on it! It's hard to grasp, I grant you. It'd take one of these psycho-analyst chaps to get the rights of it, but there it is. And it explains the whole Vanderdecken story from start to finish."

"Huh!" Cap'n Frazier snorted in his whiskers. "Ye mean to say it's all real?"

"Suit yourself, sir," said Billings, with a noisy suck at his pipe. "As for me, I have my own opinion. Good night to you!"

And he walked out, leaving us staring after him in vain speculation.

Another spirited story in this much-discussed series will be a feature of our next issue.

We Rescue



NOW, I'm no woman-hater, brother, and that's the truth. God bless the so-called weaker sex, says I, and make 'em beautiful and happy, and give 'em plenty of alimony.

But—KEEP 'EM OFF THE AIR!

Unless you're a radio ham, you'll maybe need a diagram for that crack. In the language of hams—the lingo of sixty

thousand of us amateur radio operators in the great brotherhood of the all-night short-waves, you could say it: "Love UR OW or UR YL, brother, but keep her out of the radio shack, and don't let her get bit by the ham-bug."

Meaning, naturally, that I think the dames are swell and decorative and have a proper place in the world, but that place is *not* in the ranks of the dyed-in-the-dielectric-ham.

No sir, not by a kilowatt!

And if I hadn't always felt like that about women, which I have, I would now after the awful example of Pete Wentring and the Dood frail.

Pete Wentring used to be a ham, which means he started radio when we were both kids, swapping galena crystals together, driving our respective families into the bughouse when we were practicing the Morse-International code on a couple of ten-cent-store buzzers. The difference between Pete and me is that Pete stopped being just a ham and went professional. He went to school and got a degree and joined the Union Electric Utilities Corp., so now he is *Mister P. Boettiger Wentring, R.E.*, and has a good job running the Union's experimental lab. Me, I still run that little service-station out here in Eastredge on the corner of Chestnut Street and Route 33; but I'm still a radio ham, which means I still spend the money I can't afford on the 6L6 drivers for my home-made 100-watt rig, whether or not the XYL (the Little Woman, to you) gets her fur coat or not.

Generally not.

But Peter Wentring is still my best friend, a swell guy standing six feet three inches of muscle and radio information, and he was (up until a year or so ago) a complete mouth-frothing, vinegar-spitting woman-hater.

But not now, brother, not now: which is the story.

This yarn begins one day when Pete Wentring called me on the phone and handed me this proposition:

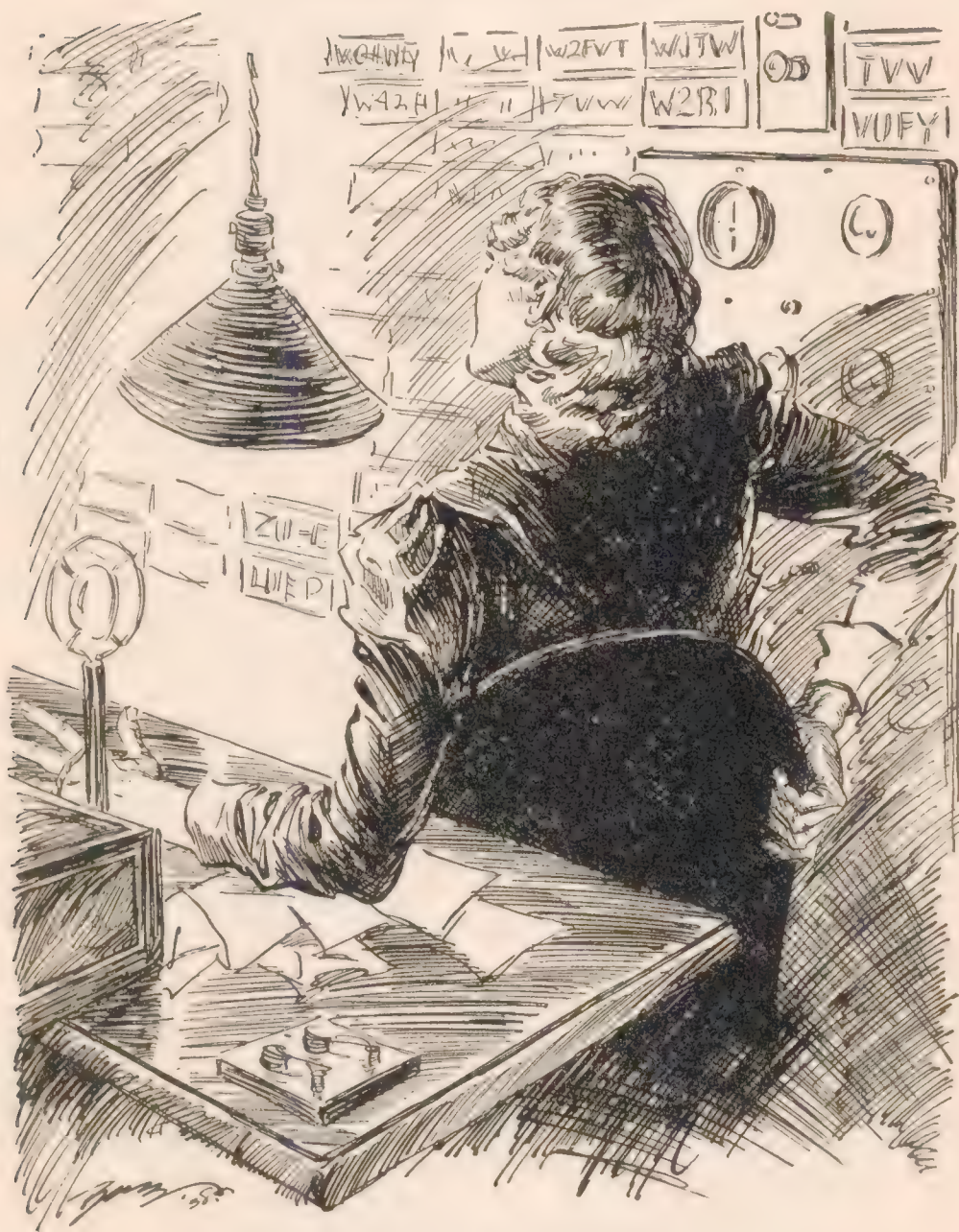
"Listen, keed," says Pete. "You know that incrementive output circuit I invented for Union? Well, we've got an order to manufacture a flock of portable

the Fair V. L.

The man who gave us "Murder Comes to Buttonville" and "Death on Talisman Mountain" is at his best in this swift-paced story.

By FULTON GRANT

Illustrated by Austin Briggs



"I was excited . . . I left the transmitter on."



The Fair Y. L.

sets for some police outfit in the Middle West, see? Only before they place the contract, we have to do some special testing. Now I've built a couple of trial transceivers, and I want to take the flivver and the trailer and go out into the sticks of Vermont and give them a two-weeks test. I need somebody to help, see? And if you can get away, I'll fix it so's the company will pay you fifty dollars a week for helping me. What say, keed? Can do?"

Sure I could do.

I could leave Benny Bass in charge of the garage and take a couple of weeks off, at any time—for a hundred bucks. But when I told Minnie,—she's the XYL, naturally,—she cocked an eye at me and said:

"There wouldn't be a blonde up there in Vermont, Larry? It sounds like a lot of balloon-juice to me."

Well, I know about women. They're sensitive and likely to be suspicious. So I told her:

"Not on your life, kid. Anyhow, who-ever heard of a blonde up in the sticks of Vermont? And you know darned well I wouldn't look at anybody but you, even in Paris, France, or Rio the Dinero."

She cocked the other eye at that one and says:

"Oh, yeah?" And we let it lay. Minnie saw a hundred-dollar coat out of that junket.

So Pete Wentring came around next morning, and we loaded up the old trailer with food and gas, and off we went in a cloud of enthusiasm. . . .

The Vermont State line begins near the Adirondacks, and when we crossed it we hit a little town called Poultney which is about three hundred miles out

of li'l ol' New York, as the crow flies. Not that we followed the crows, because Pete had heard of a place called Turnford which is a snug little burg in the Green Mountains. And he figured it would be a good place to start testing.

Well, we never got to Turnford.

No sir, after we went through Bennington, we hit a place called Bethel and went through a flock of other Biblical towns (named by the Puritans) until the flivver started wheezing and coughing with asthma and broke down right in the middle of a jungle.

I said "jungle." Maybe you don't think there are any jungles up in Vermont, but you're wrong, brother. Maybe this one was made of firs and maples instead of bamboos and lianas; but it was a thick jungle, so thick the foliage at the side of our road might as well have been a brick wall.

However, Pete said the trees and the mountains all around would make swell tough conditions to begin the testing in, so we set up the portable rig and went to work.

It was dark when we broke down, and it must have been about eight o'clock when we finally went on the air, starting on the ultra-short-wave bands like the two-way police-calls out West. I told you Pete was a wow of a radio man, and certainly his new transceiver circuit was a honey. We pushed our signals through the natural static and interference from the u.f.h. hams, so they came into the New York laboratory like a big broadcast station.

But it got to be around ten o'clock, and the Union lab told us to switch up to the heavy interference channels like the seventy-five-meter band and find out if we could push through the racket.

We did, too, for a while; and that's where the trouble came.

THINGS were going great and everybody was happy, till suddenly there was a powerful transmitter turned loose right in our ear that simply made hash out of our testing. It was a ham station, but it was a whopper. It had a carrier-wave that sounded like a pipe-organ in a Harlem flat, and when the operator started talking, she simply drowned us out altogether.

I said "she," because the operator was a woman.

"Calling CQ, CQ, CQ, CQ," she chirruped. "This is X2MBY calling CQ, CQ on seventy-five meters. Hello, CQ—"

Could we tune her out? We could not. Did she make Pete Wentring mad? She certainly did.

"Who ever let a woman run a rig like that?" he bellowed at me. "There ought to be laws against it. If I had my way, I'd—"

And so forth, while that carrier heterodyned like Ted Lewis' trombone, right in our ear.

"Maybe," I suggested, when Pete was almost in apoplexy, "if you should ask her real nice, she'd switch onto another band. I think we can fix this rig to tune her out if we get a chance to work on it."

But Pete wasn't being nice just then.

"LISTEN, lady," he yelled into the mike. "Why don't you cut some of that power? Are you trying to raise China or the Aussies? I got a job out here testing a portable rig. Why don't you climb down on another band and give a feller a chance? Or if you think you own the air, lemme speak to your OM."

OM, maybe you know, is a husband or a boy friend or any man at all in ham-language; and Pete just couldn't cope with the idea that this frail was her own operator and maybe owner of a rig like that. Lots of YLS and XYLS talk over their OM's rig, but very few of them operate their own.

But was he wrong?

And was she sore?

"As far as I know, Mister," she told him right back, "the air is free if you've got a license. This is my wave-length, and I don't have any OM. If you want to test your toy radio, why don't you go up on the 160 meters with the kids? Anyhow, you can't talk to me like that, and you can take your gadget and go to thunder."

That just about set Pete Wentring off in an explosion of blood-vessels.

He was fit to be tied. He swore, which isn't right to a lady and is bad etiquette over the air. He called her names. He told her what he thought about women tinkering with radio. He told her to go back to the sink and mind her dishes. In fact, he got so bad I took the mike away from him and broke in.

"Listen, lady," I said as nice as I could. "My pal here has a job, see? We've got to make these tests. This is very important, and it isn't a toy. He's one of the best radio engineers in the business, too. I know he hadn't ought to talk to you like that, but you've got him

worried. Now be a good girl and give us a chance, will you? I'm a married man myself, lady, and I know how it is. What d'yuh say, lady, huh?"

She said plenty.

"So you're a married man, huh?" she said. "I'll bet your friend isn't. No woman would marry a man with a nasty temper like that. I'll bet he thinks a woman's place is at the stove, the tramp. I wouldn't get off this band now if you paid me in diamonds."

Well, Pete was hog-mad. He twisted our loop around until he could get the jane's direction figured out, and then he wanted me to take the flivver apart and fix it so's we could find that station and wreck it. You never saw anybody so mad.

But we stayed the night right there, because I wouldn't touch that flivver until morning. Next day I found the trouble—it was only some goo in the gas-feed; and we started off again.

Did we go to Turnford? We did not. We took a side-road in the direction of that radio-station instead, and pretty soon we came to a big house in a clearing of the woods with a big Hertz aerial up on a high pole, and I could see Pete was getting ready for a fight. Lucky that ham was a YL and not an OM, because Pete is a very bad actor in a fight when he gets sore.

WELL, we got out and went up on the porch of the house. Pete jammed his thumb at the bell, and we stood there waiting.

But the person who answered that ring was no woman.

It was a weird little bird with a big head and a little body and white hair. He only stood about five feet three, and he had a nice, quiet, far-away voice when he opened the door.

"Ah—er—how do you do, gentlemen?" he said, kind of vaguely. "Terribly sorry, but—don't want any—"

"Any what?" Pete roared at him.

"Why, whatever it is you're selling. . . . Too busy—must hurry back. Sorry—"

I knew right away this old duck was harmless; but Pete was still mad.

"Listen, Mister," he snapped. "We don't want to sell anything. We're looking for a woman. We want the woman who was talking over the radio last night."

The little man grinned and nodded,

"Radio—radio? Ah, yes, my daughter. . . . Of course. Won't you step in,



gentlemen? Always glad to see Daughter's friends."

"Friends!" said Pete. "We aren't her friends."

The old fellow didn't seem to get it.

"Indeed, indeed," he said. "Well, well, well. Now, do come in. Daughter's gone to town—be back sometime—would be sorry not to see you. Must excuse me now—must work—very delicate work—in laboratory. Very important."

Now the word *laboratory* is one of Pete Wentrings' words. He knows about labs. Mention a laboratory to Peter, and you've waved catnip at a cat.

"Huh," he said. "What's that, sir? I'm a lab man myself. Don't let us stop you—unless I could—"

Apparently the old duck was affected the same way.

"Ah—er—ah—you say you're a laboratory man? Well, well, well. . . . Naturally—what is your interest, boy?"

"Radio," said Pete brightly. "I'm an engineer."

Well, it started there. And it ended when they walked out on me, arm in arm, leaving me sitting on the parlor lounge and looking at the last month's *Journal of Applied Science in America*, and waiting for the show to begin.

THE show began all right when the front door opened and a blonde vision walked in.

She was a sylph, or a lymph or a triad, or whatever those things are that hang around the woods and get into poetry. She came floating in like she was used to the place, and she turned her ultra-violet eyes on me and cooed:

"Hello. Are you waiting for Papa? I'll bet he's forgot you're here. Maybe he thinks it was yesterday you came, or something. Poor Papa, he's so forgetful when he's working."

I was just going to stand up and tell her we weren't waiting for Papa but for her, and who we were and why, when the door opens, and in comes the little old man and Pete.

"Ah, there you are, Sylvia," said the ancient gnome. "Let me present Mr. Wentrings—Mr. P. Boettiger Wentrings, one of the most interesting young men



I wasn't exactly out—I could hear Barney say, "Ooff!"

I've had the pleasure of meeting in a long time, my dear. And this"—indicating me—"is his friend. Mr. Wentring is quite sound on electronic phenomena, my dear. Surprisingly sound indeed—a radio man, naturally. I thought you might have them both to dinner, Sylvia."

And the blonde vision called Sylvia turned her orbs on Peter, who fell head over heels, right there and then. You could see it. You could feel it. You could hear it. He stared back with his mouth open. He got red in the face, and stepped on his own feet. And he started puffing like a catfish on dry sand when he said:

"How d'ye do, ma'am. Y'see, we—"

She crossed the room, shook our hands and chirruped in a Piping Rock voice.

"Why, of course they'll stay, Papa. We have so few friends anyhow, and nobody ever comes out here."

Peter and the old man had most of the dinner conversation, talking a lot about cathode-rays and valve-skips and a lot of other scientific stuff, until I gathered the old man was somebody I ought to know about, and was just about to invent something wonderful in that lab of his. So they left me to chatter with the little



girl, which was decidedly okay by me, even if I had told the XYL there weren't any blondes in Vermont.

Twice during the evening she said to me:

"Isn't it strange? I would swear I had heard your voices somewhere—"

Which I didn't answer at all.

But after dinner I thought we had played around enough, and so I reminded Pete Wentring that we had a testing job to do in the trailer.



Professor Dood

"Oh," chirruped the sylph. "How wonderful to be radio men! And so you have a wonderful portable radio Mr. Wentring invented all by himself? I'd love to see it; really I would. Is it real tiny and cute? Can a girl carry one in her handbag? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could always have one with us and talk to friends any time! Oh, please do let me see it, won't you?"

For a minute I thought that hand-bag crack would burn Peter up. He started to glare at her, but when he saw that angel-face, he grinned instead.

"No, ma'am," he said. "It isn't cute, and you can't carry it in your handbag, but it's a pretty good rig, just the same. I built it myself and it's got what it takes. Sure you can take a look if you want to. Glad to have you."

SO she did. We said good night to the old man, and she came out with us to the trailer. And when she got there, she suddenly turned off the charm and said in a nasty voice:

"Listen: I know who you are. You're the toads who swore at me last night when I was on the air. Think I didn't know that hoarse tenor of yours, *Mister Wentring*? You can't impress me with your two-bit spark-plug portable. And I'm on to you. You know what Papa's doing, and you're trying to chisel in on him somehow. Now, you get out of here and off this property, or I'll call a cop. On your way."

Poor Pete! He opened his big mouth and gulped—tried to say something, and it wouldn't come. He was still gulping when the girl lit out of the trailer, slammed the door, swished across the road and stalked into her own driveway.

"Well," I voiced. "Of all the little snippy—"

"Shut up, you," Pete snarled at me; and I caught on. Love is a queer if wonderful thing; and when it hits 'em at first sight like that, you never know what will happen.

"Do you," demanded Peter-the-woman-hater Wentring, "happen to know who that old duck is? Do you know whose daughter little Sylvia is, Larry?"

I didn't because nobody had mentioned any names at all.

"He is Elihu Dood, Elihu Melancthon Dood, the greatest electrical scientist in America: that's who! And she's his daughter: that's who! And do you know what he's got in that lab? No, you poor ignorant sap, you wouldn't. He's got nearly perfected a small power-tube for smashing atoms. It'll revolutionize the world. It will give us new industrial power. It will make coal and oil and gas look like sawdust for fuel purposes. Why, say, if this little old guy is right, we can get more power from the atoms of a pinch of salt or a handful of sand than we can now out of fifty barrels of petroleum oil. Sylvia Dood, that's who she is. And to think I talked to her like that! To think I insulted her! She's got a right to be sore. I tell you, Larry, I never knew what a sap I was before I met her. I've been wasting my life; that's what. Now I'm gonna finish my job and come back and show her I'm not so bad as she thinks. I'm gonna—"

I let him rave, and he did.

I had heard, vaguely, about Elihu Dood; but I didn't like being called down by his two-by-four blonde sylph of a daughter, even if my pal was losing his mind over her. But I shut up, and we started off.

We got as far as we could go before ten o'clock, which was quite a way off from the Dood place; then we stopped and hitched up the rig again for the tests. Everything was fine, and we were going to town, talking to New York like they were in the next room, and then talking to some special testing-station way off near the Great Lakes, and Pete was almost forgetting about his blonde YL. Almost, but not quite.

It was about midnight when the tests were over, and so Pete turns on the seventy-five-meter band and listened in.

"Maybe she'll be talking again," he said. "Hasn't she a wonderful voice?"

My answer can't be printed.

She *was* talking again. We could hear that carrier-wave of hers like the drone of an airplane; and then we heard her working with some ham down in Baltimore, cooing away like a little love-bird instead of a serpent-tongued little twist the way she had acted with us.

Which was like putting, to Pete Wentrington, a burr under a jackass' tail.

HE busted into that conversation with a full one-hundred-watt output. He chimed right into their conversation with:

"Wait a minute, you down in Baltimore; this is special. Listen, Miss Dood: this is Pete Wentrington. I wanted to tell you you got us wrong this evening. I wish you'd stop being mad at me. Honest, we—"

She bit him off right there.

"Say," she squeaked into her mike. "Don't you come butting into my talk. How long have you been a ham, you ham? Don't you know it isn't ethical to bust in on people? And I don't want to talk to you, anyhow. I'm on to you. Seventy-three, you! And if I never hear of you again, it will be too soon."

Then she signed off to Baltimore and closed her shop.

Next day, same thing approximately. We tested all over Vermont and part of New Hampshire; and around ten o'clock, Pete tuned in again on X2MBY, which is (or was) the vinegar-like Sylvia Dood's call-number. And she was even worse than before. She not only insulted him but she made him like it. I never saw a man lose his pride and self-respect like Peter Wentrington. She called him a flat-faced boob and a club-footed herring, which wasn't a good simile but just as effective. And he practically purred.

The next day still was a Friday, and it was also the same as before and ditto. Except the way it ended.

The radio-fan called Sylvia Dood was talking away with her Baltimore boyfriend, and Pete broke right in again, still trying to apologize, and getting nowhere at all. She handed him the worst razzing yet, and was going strong when all of a sudden she let out a little scared yelp—we could hear it just as plain—and then we didn't hear her voice any more.

But we still could hear her carrier-wave—the unmodulated high-frequency whine of her transmitter.

"Now, what the hell," Pete asked me, "would that mean? She wouldn't go off and forget to switch off her rig, would she?"

I told him I hoped it meant she died at the mike, but he didn't seem to like that.

"Maybe," he said, "she fainted or something. The poor kid, the poor little kid!"

I think my remark was: "Nertz!"

Well, the night went on, and we tried to sleep in the trailer again, but Pete kept getting up and switching on the receiver, listening for the Sylvia number.

Naturally, she didn't come back to talk again. But the *un*-natural thing was that her carrier-wave was still going strong. And that just didn't make any sense.

"There's something darned queer about that, Larry," Pete told me; and even though I growled at him and told him to shut up and go to sleep, I began to wonder about that carrier-wave. People don't forget to switch off the juice in xmitter tubes that cost from ten to a hundred dollars apiece—not even sappy YL's like this Dood woman. Sure it was queer; I had to admit it.

And in the morning after a night you couldn't just call restful, we tried X2MBY once more, and that damned carrier was still going strong.

Which was too much for Pete.

"We're going back, Larry," he told me; and we did that.

WE got to the Dood ranch-in-the-jungle about noon, after a rattle-bang trip across the State over soggy dirt roads. The day was wet and gloomy anyhow, and the thick foliage around Dood's place made it like a perfect setting for a real hot murder. Get the idea? That carrier-wave running on all by itself had made us morbid.

When we saw the house, we stopped, and Pete tuned in on that wave again, just to be sure. It was still roaring, all right, like a calliope gone screwy. And it was then that Pete did his big stuff.

He raised the local State police on his portable xmitter.

The cops didn't seem to like that, either.

"Who the hell is that?" somebody howled. "Don't you hams know this band is restricted to police use? I'll have your license revoked. I'll—"

"Hold on," said Pete, "I'm reporting a murder or a kidnaping or maybe both. Anyhow, there's something queer—"

"Well, make up your mind, sweetheart," said the cop. "Who is it, where, what and why, and who gets the berry?"

Pete told him our story. The cop wasn't impressed at all. On the contrary, he was annoyed. But he said he'd send a patrol-car over pretty soon, and we had to let it go at that.

WE went over to the house. We rang and we pounded, and there wasn't even a whisper in that house. So we started looking around outside.

"Maybe we can get in a window," Pete suggested. "The poor kid! I wonder if she's in trouble."

I hoped she was.

We got about as far as the high hedge on the west side, and Pete was trying a window on the ground floor, when a voice snapped:

"Hold it, you! Reach yourself a star."

And when I turned and saw a hard-looking gent with a mean automatic pointed at my *embonpoint*, I reached for a star, *pronto* and sudden. I'll take my lead poison through the face, please.

The bird stepped out of the hedge, then, and he gave us a queer once-over. Pete started explaining, saying:

"You got us wrong, Mister. We were only trying to find out—"

"Yeah?" cuts in the yegg. "You was jest waiting fer a street-car—out here in the woods. I getcha. Well, start walkin' an' keep yer hands up. Snap into it, youse."

And we walked.

We walked toward the back of the Dood house, and then the yegg pushed us into a path that led to a summer-house.

"I'm bringin' a coupla punks, boss," he called out to somebody inside. "Better keep 'em covered."

"Okay," said a voice inside. "Send them in, Barney."

Barney gave us a shove. I went first, Pete following after me; and no sooner had I stuck my face through that door, when something crashed on top of my head and knocked me for a loop.

I wasn't exactly out. I was just off in a dull gray world alone where I could see a lot of things happening but couldn't take any part. What happened was Pete. Maybe I mentioned he is a big burly guy. Maybe you noticed he hadn't been in a good temper for a while. And when whoever it was smacked me with that persuader and I fell, Pete Wentring just went *must*, like an elephant.

His foot went out back in a mule-kick, and he must have caught that tough-guy called Barney in the stomach, because

even through the gray fog which dulled my brain I could hear Barney say, "Oooff!" and collapse. But Pete was jumping over me and doing things inside. I told you it was dark in there. I couldn't see much, but I could still feel. And I felt a thousand feet—all belonging to Pete Wentring and some invisible bird—stepping on my face and hands and body while I lay there on the floor; and I could hear the grunts and smacks of fists. Then there was an explosion right in my ear, and something terrible smacked me in the shoulder, and I went completely out, carrying with me the awful feeling that Pete had been killed.

Just how long I was out I couldn't guess—maybe half an hour; but when I came to, I was sitting on the floor of an automobile which was moving fast; and there was a pair of bracelets on my hands, and I could hear Pete's voice loud and protesting:

"You're crazy as hell, cop," he was saying. "I'm the guy that put in that radio call. My pal and I were just looking around when this bird jumped us with a gun; and when he walked us into that summerhouse, I took a chance and started action. The bird inside shot his gat and hit my pal, see?"

"Yeah," says the cop's voice. "I see, all right. You can tell that to the chief. He'll set it to music."

Maybe I groaned then. Anyhow, I began to get some attention from Pete, and I tried to talk; only the cop didn't like that, so he clouted me with the flat of his hand and said:

"Shut up, you!" So I did.

We got to a town which, I learned later, is called Chanford, and which is quite a town for Vermont, and where there is a State police headquarters. When the cops piled us out of the car, I saw there were two other men in bracelets besides Pete and me. When the captain had us dragged in, the cop who brought us told his story.

"I GO up to old Dood's place, Cap," he says, "and I hear a shot. I get there in time to see this big gorilla beating hell out of the thin one in that summerhouse. He must have hit him with everything in the place, because the guy was bad cut up, and the other one was down with a busted rib. They give me a lot of guff about just lookin' around, when the thick one holds 'em up with his gat, only I don't listen, see? And Harry here" (that was another cop)

I had tried to tell our story—
no one would listen.



"takes a look around the house, and you can see somebody's been raising hell in it. Everything is upside down. Everything is all over the floor. And there's no sign of either the old Professor or his daughter. Now you know somebody called us and gave us a yarn about a murder and a kidnaping? Well, I wasn't taking any chances, Chief. I brought 'em all in."

Apparently the captain thought that was okay, too.

Well, I was feeling better, and I started to tell our story, only the captain didn't seem interested.

"Shut up, you," he said; and then to the cops: "Lock 'em all up and hold 'em until I have a look around. Then we'll ask the questions—not them."

And the next thing I knew, I was in a nice tidy jail. I had a cell of my own—I had no idea where Pete or the gangsters were put.

It took me some time before I noticed that I had a bad wound in my shoulder; but it didn't get me any sympathy from the cops. They bandaged my arm and made me shut up, and let me alone in that clean cement cell, and wouldn't listen to a word.

About seven o'clock at night the Captain came back with a couple of young men who looked like the press.

"What's your name?" he asked me.

"Larry Flynn," I told him.

"Prove it?"

I gave him my address, and he wrote it down.

"Are you a radio man?" he asked me, and I told him no, that Pete was the radio man. The quiz went on like that, not getting anywhere much, and nobody caring a hoot about hearing my story at all; and finally they locked me up again, and that was all that happened until next morning, when a smart-aleck cop came to my cell and waved a newspaper.

"Hello, wise-guy," he greeted me. "Wanna see how famous you are?"

And he spread out the newspaper showing me the blazing headlines which

carried a story that made me just about burn up.

SCIENTIST DOOD AND DAUGHTER VANISH IN MYSTERIOUS VERMONT RACKET-WAR: MURDER, KIDNAP- ING THOUGHT LIKELY

Vermont Police Hold Four Men in Weirdly
Puzzling Case; Dood Known as
Pioneer in Atomic Power

Then they ran our names, mine and Peter's, along with those of Barney Mux, a known hop-head and gangster; and a man called Frank Beerly, who, according to the paper, could not be identified, refused to talk and acted generally queer.

But the big note in the article was the story of the havoc found in the Dood place, and the fact that the radio transmitter was still running when the cops looked the place over. The "murder-kidnap" angle was brought up by the fact that the old Prof's laboratory was in disorder, a terribly valuable electron-gun tube found broken, and a lot of human blood found on the floor, on the work-table, and trailing all the way upstairs to the little room where Sylvia Dood had her radio rig.

Of course that was what got me down.

"Listen, you big sap," I told the cop. "If you guys would let us tell a straight story, I could make you see a lot more about this case than you seem to get. You're all twisted. We've been trying to tell you that we were the ones who first sent in that radio message telling you something was wrong. We—"

"Yeah," said the cop, "I know. Just a boy-scout, just a boy-scout. Listen, guy: d'you ever hear of the firm called Autopower, Inc.? Tell me that one."

Well, you could have knocked me cold with a fender. I told you that I had a

garage business out in Eastredge. What I didn't tell you is that a long time ago I took out some papers and incorporated myself, on account I wanted to get some financing for a bigger and better service station. Well, I never got the cash, so I just forgot all about the corporation.

And the name I incorporated under was: *Autopower, Inc.*

"Sure," I told the cop. "I'm it. . . . I'm Autopower. But it doesn't mean anything. What's up?"

"Ah-hai!" said friend cop. "That's what I wanna know."

And then he walked out.

They kept me in that hoosegow all morning. As I paced the floor, I began to wonder about Minnie the XYL back home, and the kids, and if Benny was making out all right with the garage, and if the Jersey cops would bust into my place and take it apart to investigate. Believe me, brother, sitting in a cooler is no fun.

And then that same wise-guy cop came along with another newspaper.

"WELL, Mr. Autopower," he wisecracked, flashing the headlines at me. "How do you like them apples?"

I stared at the paper, and it took some time for it all to penetrate. What I saw was:

INDUSTRIAL WARFARE THOUGHT
BEHIND DOOD MYSTERY; PETRO-
LEUM INTERESTS SUSPECTED
OF CRIMINAL SABOTAGING
Vanished Scientist's Wonderful Atomic Power
Would Have Made Coal, Oil Obsolete;
Industry Believed Hidden Behind
Mysterious "Autopower, Inc."

"Come on, lad," said the cop, acting nice as pie now. "Why don't you spill it? You can just tell us who is paying you fellows to snitch old Dood—the big shots, see? And we'll see that you get away with a light sentence. Whaddya say, keed? Tell papa—"

Well, that floored me. I began to see a glimmer of light, though. It was pretty clear that old Dood *had* found some way of doing that much-heralded thing, harnessing the atom to get a new and unlimited source of energy. If he did, it would be likely to throw all the coal and oil people out of business overnight, and I could see where some one might take steps to stop him. Apparently somebody else had that idea, and that was the dope that went into the newspapers.

But how they could work a couple of innocent mugs like Pete Wentrang and me into that gag I didn't see, until I began to ask a question or to on my own. Then I got it.

Autopower, Inc.!

I DIDN'T know it at the time, of course, but there was another corporation—a Delaware corporation, while mine was a Jersey corporation—by the same name, and it turned out to be a holding company for a lot of oil, electric and other industrial power companies all over the country. How would I know that? And the worst of it was that Pete Wentrang's company, the Union Electric Utilities, was one of the little subsidiaries of another big organization which was controlled by this little holding company.

Fantastic? Sure it was. But try to explain a coincidence like that to a cop.

And then it was clearly shown that this Frank Beerly was in the employ of a great international petroleum company which was also affiliated with the same. They learned that when his lawyer turned up. Beerly was a truck-driver, apparently, but he didn't have any truck-driver's license.

Well, this might have gone on and on and on, and maybe it would have turned out to be pretty bad for all of us, only something happened.

What happened was Sylvia Dood.

She turned up.

She simply drove into the State police headquarters in her car, stepped lightly into the office, and announced herself.

"I'm Sylvia Dood," she said; and then, "I want to know what this is all about. Who started this story about my papa and me being killed or kidnaped? We aren't at all. There's nothing wrong at all. Can't people move out of their own house and go back to the city without the cops getting crazy?"

Apparently they couldn't.

"How do we know you're the Dood girl?" asked the wise-guy cop, which was pretty good, I thought. But there were a flock of newspaper men there by this time, and they all knew her by sight, so that one didn't help much. Then they brought the four of us—Pete and me and the two others—out into the big office where things go on; and when Sylvia saw Pete, she fairly screamed at the cops.

"So that's who it is, hey? That city-hick. Well, if I'd known that—"

"Lady," said the chief, "do you know this guy?"

"No," she said, "and I don't want to. I think he's a spy or an agent for some of those gas companies that want to buy Papa's atoms. I wouldn't want to know him if he was the last man on a desert island, I—"

And so on. I thought that little blonde number would get us both run in for charges again, and I could have strangled her. But finally she told her tale.

"You see," she said, "I was talking over the radio—I'm a ham operator and I've got a rig. And this fellow"—meaning Pete—"butts in on my conversation with X3BBV in Baltimore, and I got mad. He was always butting in, ever since he came to our house the other day; and after he was so mean—"

"I thought you said you didn't know him?" said a cop, with a certain amount of reason.

"I'm just telling you I don't, and don't want to," said fair Sylvia. Then she went on; "And right in the middle of it, Papa came upstairs and stood in the doorway dripping blood from a bad cut on his hand where one of his tubes broke on him. Well, I was pretty excited, and I went off and left the transmitter running. I bandaged Papa's hand, and I saw he was so weak and excited I thought we ought to go right back to the city the next day, where he could have a doctor's care. So I packed everything I could myself, and off we went. I didn't remember about the transmitter until I saw that crazy story in the papers. Papa is still in bed, and has a trained nurse to keep him quiet. So I just got into the car and drove up here to see what it was all about and to shut off the juice. Say, why can't a girl go away without starting all this nonsense?"

It was Pete who spoke then.

"NOW, you see?" he told the cops. "I've been trying to tell you for a couple of days that I just called you because that transmitter was still running. I heard her yell, and then there wasn't any voice, and—"

"Oh," said Sylvia, breaking in on him. "You did that? You really were worried, and you called the police because you heard my carrier-wave?"

"Sure I did."

"Oh," said Sylvia. "Oh, how wonderful! How wonderful to think somebody

would be so thoughtful. Oh, you poor boy, and you got into all this trouble! I think you're a dear. And I think you're just wonderful to invent a radio like the one you have. I was a mean little snip to talk to you the way I did, and I'm sorry—"

Oh well, there's the picture, brother.

AND what about those other birds, the ones who walloped me on the bean and shot me in the shoulder? Well, almost nothing. They were just a couple of second-rate crooks trying to case the house, and we stepped in at the wrong time. The guy called Frank Beerly had been a truck-driver for a branch of the Black Shale International, but he had lost his job and his license a year or so ago, and the Barney number was just a plain yegg doing his daily dozen. That's all, brother. No more than that.

So they let us go.

So we drove back to the Dood jungle-ranch with Sylvia.

And so Sylvia sent a telegram to Papa in Boston, where he was recovering from a cut through a vein in his hand, and Sylvia came along with us while we did the rest of our testing. . . .

And so they're married, now, Sylvia and Peter Wentring; and the fair YL has become the fair XYL, all on account of a carrier-wave turned loose without a modulator.

All of which gives me a pain in the neck and ought to be a warning to all other hams. Because when I went to see them—Minnie and her new fur coat and me—do you think it was P. Boettiger Wentring, R.E. who was DX-ing on the brand new 200-watt xmitter and using the swell new Hollycrafter Super-Pro? No, it wasn't. It was Sylvia Dood Wentring, a frail little blonde with a shirtful of glamour, and icicles on her tongue when she gets mad.

She was listening to Kirkee, India, which is VWY on 8.957 megacycles, when we came in; and Pete called up to her to come on down and meet the folks; and what do you think she said? She said:

"Keep still, you big calf. Haven't you got any respect for a feller trying to listen on the radio?"

And big Pete Wentring, the ex-woman-hater, just cooed and said:

"All right, dear. Hurry up, though."

It made me sick. The place for the XYL is at the sink.

Another unusual story by Fulton Grant will appear in our next issue.

NEVADA

By FREDERICK BECHDOLT

Illustrated by Peter Kuhlhoff



They were there, all right,
far below him on the slope.

THERE had been a dust-storm in the desert just before Lawton reached the Chocolate Mountains; he and his car were covered with a thick gray coating which kept dissolving into a fine cloud, obstructing both vision and breathing. So when he arrived at Indio, instead of driving on as he had intended, he elected to stop over for the night.

Indio was booming then, for the great Los Angeles aqueduct which was to lead a river of fresh water from the Colorado across the State of California was under construction; and it happened to be Saturday evening. Some hundreds of hard-rock men and truck-drivers were surging into town, to get rid of their week's pay. The glare of colored lamps hovered over service stations and moving-picture palaces; the racket of two or three jazz orchestras came through the gathering dusk. By the tracks, was a bit of park

with fresh damp flower-beds and green turf. Lawton waited for a pause in the stream of passing cars and crossed the street, seeking quiet in this oasis.

A semblance of a breeze was seeping up from the valley, like the gush of warm air from an oven on baking-day. The tall palms were whispering to one another; the tinkle of a fountain came out of the shadows, and the odor of freshly mown grass. Lawton found a vacant bench and settled down to watch the street crowd, a blur of moving figures now and pleasant to the eye. The beam of a passing locomotive caught his face and made it stand out among the surrounding shadows. A lean face and dark, the black lashes were a trifle heavy over the glowing eyes; and there was something about him, as he sat there, leaning a little forward, gazing into the outlying dust, which suggested a brooding hawk. It was only for a brief moment that he held that look; even now it passed as swiftly as it had come and his lips relaxed.

But the discontent remained like a shadow hovering in his dark eyes, and he stirred restlessly upon the bench as he sat there taking inventory of his prospects in life. To many men in the crowd across the street, his position would appeal as eminently satisfactory: a little more than two hundred dollars and a good car, by way of assets, with no debts to offset them. These things, and youth.

Somehow they failed to appeal to him. He was thinking of the last job, which he had left less than a week ago, down across the line in the mountains south of Cannanea. And how he could have made the mine a paying proposition—a good mine for years to come—if he only had been allowed to follow his own will. It occurred to him that he had been going on this way for five years now, ever since

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GOLD

The able writing man who gave us "The Hazardous Highway," "Youth Rides Victorious," and many another fine story is at his best in this spirited novel of a 1938 gold-rush.

he had got his first position where he held authority; always pitting the knowledge which he had gained by working underground and afterward as an honor student in a Western school of mines—pitting this practical experience and the theory of the textbooks against the shortsightedness of directorates. And all he had to show for it was a portion of his last month's salary.

"WHAT I have got to do is to go on my own," he told himself. It occurred to him that this was not the first time he had arrived at the same decision, and his smile vanished once more. He was still frowning when he looked up at the sound of footsteps on the gravel path. There was something about the approaching man that held his attention.

It might have been in the face or it might have been in the manner of the newcomer's actions; Lawton did not know what it was, but he looked at the other closely. A man of middle age, large of girth and with wide shoulders, he was wearing light-colored flannels and a silk shirt, with a flowing tie of loud colors; his straw hat was tilted back, allowing what light there was to fall on his face: a large face, flat as a china plate, with a wide tight mouth. What with its width and the insignificance of the chin, it made Lawton think of the mouth of a man-eating shark which he had once seen on the beach down in Baja, California. The pale eyes were disquieting.

And as Lawton was telling himself this, the man whipped a quick look over his shoulder, and without waiting to turn his head again, stepped to one side and vanished in the shadows of a huge oleander tree. A second or two passed; then another man appeared around the turn of the gravel path. He came



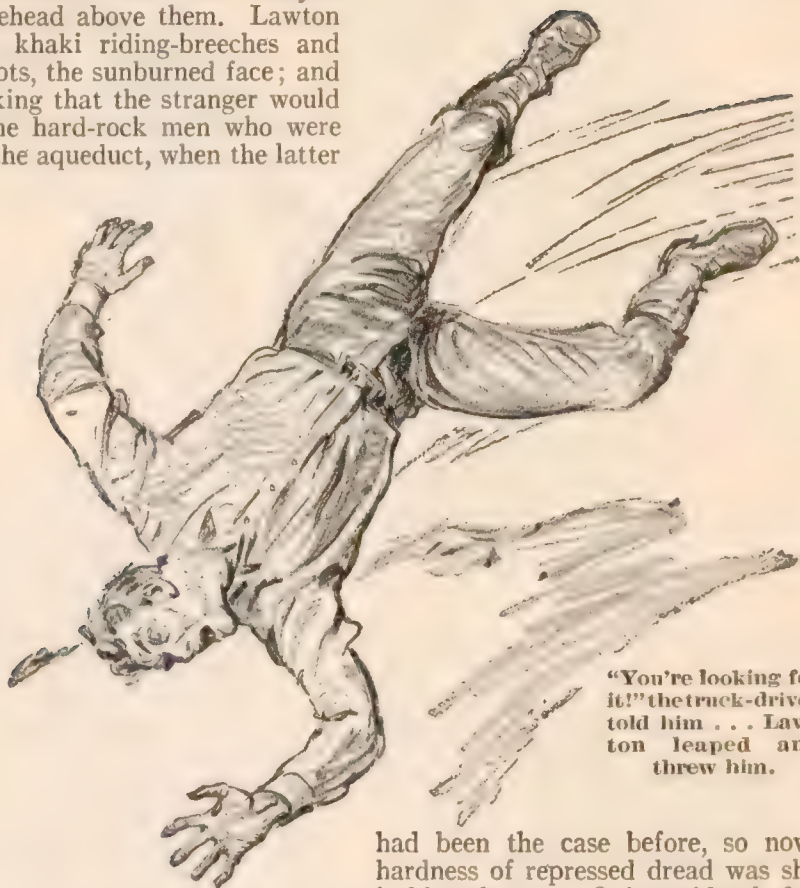
straight on, and as he passed Lawton he increased his pace as if he were seeking to overtake some one. He reached the point where the pathway joined the sidewalk outside the park and disappeared. There was a faint rustle in the lower branches of the oleander; the man with the shark mouth stepped back into sight and hurried off in the direction whence he had originally come.

The incident had at least served the purpose of turning Lawton's thoughts from the impasse into which they had wandered, and he was still busy with speculations as to the meaning of the brief scene which he had witnessed, wondering what were the other portions of the drama of which it was a part, when a huge twelve-driver locomotive awoke the echoes with a series of long blasts from its whistle. He decided that the jostling of the crowd in the street was a lesser evil than this uproar and he remembered that there was a bar not far away where he had found the beer to his liking on his way to the Mexican mine six months before.

SIX months had made a change. The bar had been enlarged. It was in fact the longest bar that Lawton had ever seen. It seemed to him, as he gazed down the room, that it was impossible so many men could be thirsty at one time. He took his place before it and he became conscious of a voice in his ear.

"This country was made to order for the breweries." The remark evidently was addressed to him. . . . A man sometimes makes up his mind, as to friendships or active dislikes, during the first momentary inspection of their objects.

Glancing into the other's eyes, Lawton turned. They were frank eyes, and met his own with a good-natured steadiness; a disordered lock of red hair strayed over the forehead above them. Lawton took in the khaki riding-breeches and the laced boots, the sunburned face; and he was thinking that the stranger would be one of the hard-rock men who were working on the aqueduct, when the latter went on:



"You're looking for it!" the truck-driver told him . . . Lawton leaped and threw him.

"But they make better beer than this in Hermosilla."

"You've been in Mexico, then?" Lawton asked.

"Four months, this time, prospecting." The puckered lines about the corners of the speaker's eyes deepened and his teeth showed briefly in a smile. "I'm on my way back to Nevada now."

"I'm a mining-man myself," Lawton said. "You'll join me?" They drank their beer without more than a word or two by way of further talk, and they turned their backs to the long counter, regarding the crowded room. It was then that the other told him:

"I'm headed for Rust Water. You've heard of the new strike?"

Lawton was shaking his head, about to answer when he saw the man with the shark mouth again. He was coming from the rear of the place, making his way among the milling groups of hard-rock men and fruit-farmers and tourists in the direction of the main entrance. And as

had been the case before, so now the hardness of repressed dread was shining in his pale eyes. Quite evidently he was in haste, and yet he seemed to be holding his movements in check, as if to hide the desire to break into a run.

Lawton and his newfound acquaintance were standing near the entrance. The double doors swung open, and as they were starting to close behind the departing figure, a pair of customers entered, throwing them wide again. So they hung for just a moment; and in that little space of time the two watchers saw the man running across the sidewalk. Then the roar of a starting motor sounded through the noise of the room. And now another man whose face seemed familiar to Lawton was fighting the closing doors with his two extended arms. He shouted:

"Stop that fellow!" Then the doors closed behind him.

The incident had aroused a slight flurry, and that was all; the crowd turned back to their various activities.

"Rust Water," Lawton said thoughtfully. "Never heard of it."



"It's north of Golconda. They got into high-grade ore." The note of eagerness in his companion's voice was unmistakable. "I've been up in that district—summer before last it was; I made up my mind then that I was coming back some day. There's a range of mountains fifty miles or so to the eastward, and it looks good to me." As if this slight bestowal of confidence had stimulated a desire for closer acquaintance, he added after a barely appreciable pause: "Murdoch is my name. Most people call me Red."

Lawton completed the introduction, and when the two of them had shaken hands, he remarked:

"They say prospecting's one of the lost arts since the burro vanished and the automobile took his place."

"It's a fact that the old-timers used to cover the ground more thoroughly," Murdoch replied. "Nowadays a man travels on a beaten road at thirty miles an hour, with some particular place in mind; and if he sees anything along the way, he tells himself that he's going to come back sometime and have a look at it. But there are plenty of good prospectors yet, and some of them have got the business down to a science, all right. It isn't a case of stumbling on a discovery when you're hunting for your stray burros; matter of fact, it never was. It's just plain hard work—knowing what you're after, and the right way to find it."

Though he had not raised his voice, his enthusiasm had become more evident, and Lawton's interest increased. The other went on:

"Take this country around Rust Water, for instance. The idea most men have of prospecting is looking for float and tracing it to the vein. But you could spend a year there working that way, and the chances are, you'd not know what you had been walking over."

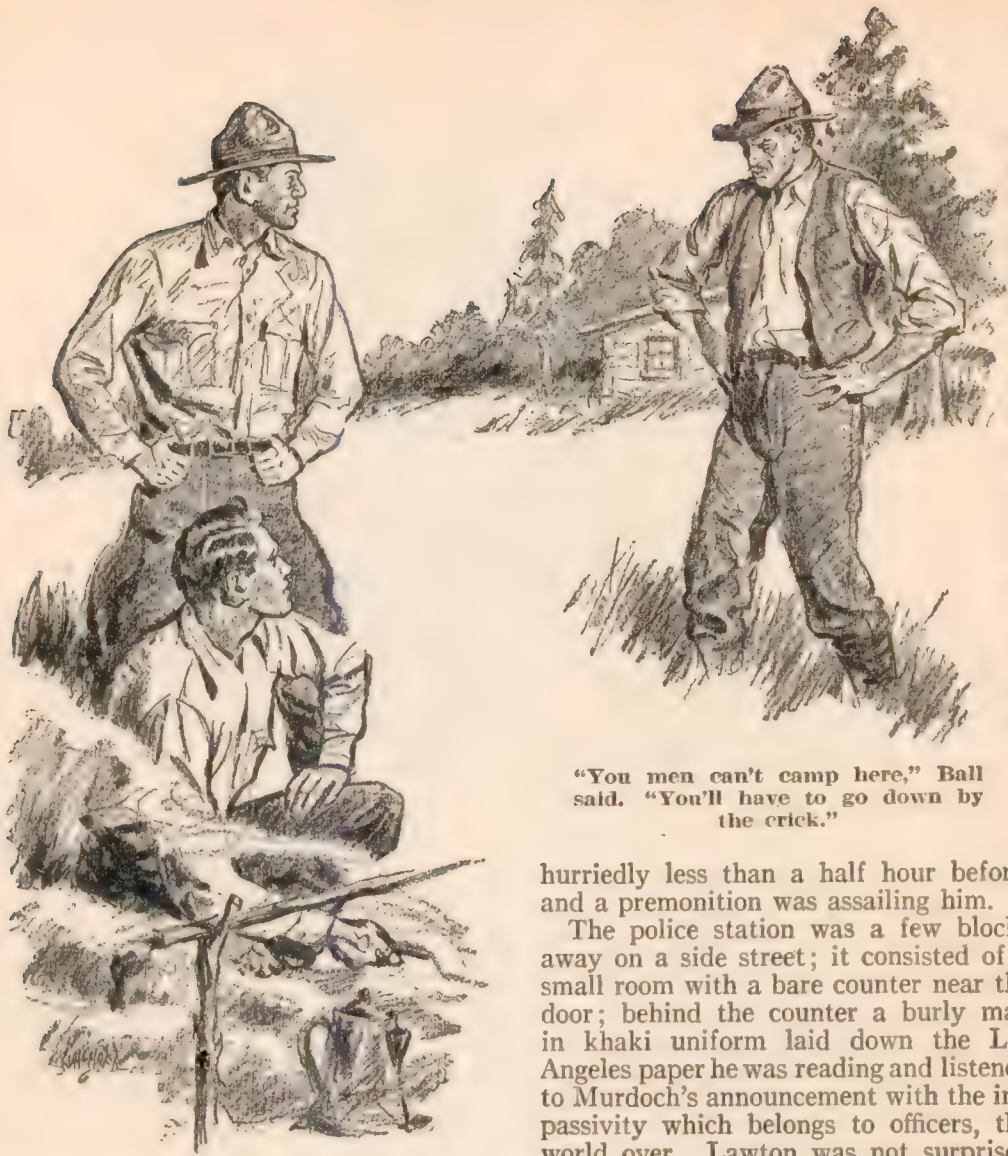
"How would you go about it?" Lawton asked.

"Panning and tracing. It's the method of the old pocket-hunters. Only, instead of the regular gold-pan, you use one of those little skilletts that they cook two eggs in. That and a prospector's pick. Dig pot-holes and search for colors; and when you find them, trace them up the hill until you put the ore in place."

"Sounds like good sense," Lawton said. "And like hard work."

"It's hard work, all right," Murdoch nodded. "And there's a knack to it. You can't learn it in a day or two. I'd like to have you with me sometime on one of those desert hills and show you—"

The noises in the long room swelled and receded around them. A man at a loud-speaker had finished with the sporting news of the day, and the cessation brought a lull, through which the voice of Murdoch came more distinctly as he went on describing his methods with the quiet intensity of a man who is in love



"You men can't camp here," Ball said. "You'll have to go down by the creek."

with his profession. Lawton was becoming conscious of his own restlessness, when the loud-speaker resumed its blare.

"Attention, everybody!" the voice arose above all other sounds in the long room. "The owner of the following described car will please report to the police as soon as possible." The voice went on, describing a light sedan: "Nineteen-thirty-four model. Nevada license. The number, Two—Two, seven, seven." There followed a brief pause, and the announcement was begun once more.

Murdock said:

"That's my car." He beckoned the nearest bartender. "Where's the police station?" And when the man had given the directions: "I left it parked two doors below here."

"I'll go along with you," Lawton offered. He was thinking of the man with the mouth like a shark, who had made his departure from the place so

hurriedly less than a half hour before, and a premonition was assailing him.

The police station was a few blocks away on a side street; it consisted of a small room with a bare counter near the door; behind the counter a burly man in khaki uniform laid down the Los Angeles paper he was reading and listened to Murdoch's announcement with the impassivity which belongs to officers, the world over. Lawton was not surprised when he said:

"The highway patrol picked your car up ten miles out on the El Centro road. They had the description, you see. We were looking for the party who took it."

"You've got it here now?" the prospector interrupted.

The officer shook his head.

"It's out there—what's left of it. It had jumped the road on a sharp turn and piled up in the ditch. This party was wanted on another charge, you understand. He was making a get-away. He must have been picked up by some driver going south, the way we figure it. The chances are, he's heading for the border."

"What was he wanted for?" Lawton asked.

"It was a Los Angeles charge," the officer answered wearily. "Some racket or other. The corporation commission had sworn out the warrant. Stock-selling—fake securities, I suppose."

"It doesn't look like Rust Water this summer." Murdoch was trying to smile but his voice was dull. Lawton laid his hand on the prospector's arm.

"I'll drive you down, and we'll see what we can save out of the wreck." His purpose was beginning to crystallize into a definite plan now. . . .

An hour later when they were back at the auto camp, with some salvage in the way of tools and bedding stowed away in the rear of Lawton's sedan, the latter had made up his mind.

"It isn't as if I didn't know anything about mining," he explained when he had put his offer to go into partnership. "And I've got some money for the grub-stake."

"Okay." Murdoch's eagerness had returned. He answered Lawton's smile with a wider one. "And now let's go find a place to eat. In the morning we'll be on the road to Rust Water."

CHAPTER II

THEY had replenished their gas-supply and bought two spare cans of oil; Lawton was filling the big three-gallon canteen with water; for when they left the brand-new town of Rust Water, the nearest approach to a service station was a ranch in the next range of mountains. Murdoch and he had spent not more than three hours here, and Lawton was thinking that he, for one, had no regrets at leaving this raw, sprawling mining-camp. It was then that he noticed what Red Murdoch was about.

The box of cartridges which the prospector had just hauled from the seat pocket was one of the few purchases made by him in Rust Water; it had been in the nature of an after-thought.

"Deer season," he had explained, "is less than a month away. We might get a chance to knock over a buck." He had finished slipping the cartridges into the magazine, and had laid the weapon under the tarpaulin which covered their supplies in the rear of the car, by the time Lawton stowed away the canteen and took his place at the wheel. And as they pulled out, leaving the purlieus of the town behind them, he said:

"I've been prospecting ever since I was a boy with my first shave ahead of me, and this is the first time I ever thought of loading that rifle when I wasn't going after fresh meat—except, of course, south of the Line."

"Rust Water didn't make a hit with you." Lawton was smiling but the smile vanished when the other asked:

"You like it?"

Lawton shook his head. "Too many wise babies with patent-leather hair."

"High-pressure lads," Red said. "Los Angeles and points East. That's what they look like. Although," he added reflectively, "I've seen that breed in old mining towns along the Mother Lode."

He broke off abruptly, and he was silent for a half a mile. Then:

"I dunno whether you noticed it or not, but there's a heap of money being spent back there in Rust Water, considering it's a one-mine camp."

"High-grading?" And Lawton nodded. "Well, maybe it's the answer. Anyhow, I don't like the bunch we saw there. But the chances are those fellows don't get out into the hills."

"Just the same," Red maintained doggedly, "this part of the country's filling up too fast. And it's the outsiders who bring trouble. Ordinarily a man could travel all over the State of Nevada and never lock his car. Now with this news of high-grade ore and the good highways, the hills are liable to get as bad as Chicago or Los Angeles."

The route, which they were to take to the Wild Rose range, had been marked by the wheels of sheep-wagons during the winter season while the flocks were feeding on the white sage along the lowlands. It departed from the main road a few miles from the town; and the portion of the latter, by which they were now traveling, passed through high dunes of wind-driven sand. Beyond that area, a maze of deep ruts wandered through the sage and greasewood, for the Rust Water Con was still shipping its ore out for milling, and incoming trucks were heavily laden with supplies. But that maze of tracks, which was a quarter of a mile wide in spots, had converged at the outer edge of the sand dunes, where it was impossible for even an unladen car to travel excepting by the narrow roadway of crushed rock. A one-way road here, with a few scant inches leeway on either side, and once a wheel dropped off, the luckless driver must wait for help to come along. At intervals there were turn-out places.

As they were nearing the sheep-wagon trail which turned off to the Wild Rose range, they began to overtake a car ahead of them. An open roadster, and Lawton noticed how the driver's bright

hair glowed in the hot sunshine, as vivid as molten metal.

"Relative of yours?" he asked his companion idly. Red shook his head.

"No girls in our family. And her hair is copper-colored; mine's carrot."

AS they were speaking, the roadster passed one of the turn-out places, and nearly a half mile farther on they saw a truck coming toward them. Between the roadster and the truck, a pole rose out of the sand with an old tire-casing on its upper end, to mark another of the sidings. The truck reached the spot, and instead of turning out, it kept straight on. Lawton swore and squeezed down the brakes. The roadster before them was slowing to a halt. For some moments it remained there motionless, and the driver's arm showed, upraised, but the truck-driver ignored the signal and did not slacken his pace. Now the roadster began backing slowly. Lawton had not pulled off as yet into the side track; he sat there at the steering-wheel, his head bent slightly forward, frowning at the scene before him.

"That girl," Red Murdoch said, "is a good driver." And Lawton answered between his teeth:

"She'd better be, or else she's out of luck."

Their eyes hung on the roadster; the girl's head and shoulders were thrust over the door, and the hot wind was tossing her hair. The wheels swerved slightly once, and Red swore aloud; then they righted themselves and came straight on. At last she reached the siding and backed into it; both men drew breaths of relief.

Lawton slipped the gear-lever into place and let the clutch back; the sedan started on. Red said:

"What are you doing?" Lawton glanced at him and smiled, and a moment later they were passing the roadster. The girl was gazing at them, and anger was in her eyes; her cheeks were flushed. She cried:

"You saw that?"

"Just sit tight," Lawton called. A moment later he brought the sedan to a stop just beyond the farther end of the turn-out. "Take the wheel, Red," he said quietly, and flung the door open. He got out and stood beside the narrow pavement of crushed rock. The truck was drawing close now, and the driver's head was thrust forward from the cab; his arm moved in an imperi-

ous gesture. Lawton glanced back at Red, and he was smiling, but there was no good-nature in the smile.

"Another of your patent-leather hair-cuts," he said. The truck came to a stop, and the voice of the driver sounded above the idling motor.

"What's the big idea?"

From the wheel of the sedan Red Murdoch was appraising the width of shoulders and the thick neck beneath that sleek head of hair—and one of his hands was resting lightly on the door latch. Lawton was saying:

"That's your turn-out." He was pointing down the road, and while he spoke, he started toward the truck.

Murdoch freed the latch and started to open the door, but that was as far as he got before things started.

The truck-driver was resorting to profanity to emphasize his assertions. He opened the cab door; he was holding the heavy starting-crank in one hand.

"Okay," he said. "You're looking for it!"

Lawton leaped upon the running-board and dived in before the blow fell; his arms wrapped about the other's body. The two men lurched down beside the roadway, and the driver struck again; the heavy crank found its mark this time, but the blow was short. Lawton had completed the hold he was seeking. He flung the man over his shoulder.

Red Murdoch uttered a shout of joy from the sedan. The truck-driver's body soared through the air; his arms outspread, one hand still clinging to the starting-crank. He fell in the middle of the clump of greasewood, and he scrambled to his feet with catlike quickness; but Lawton had struck twice before he had time to raise the weapon, once to the body, and the other blow met the jaw at the angle where the chin creases. And now the crank fell from nerveless fingers; the man crumpled like an empty sack into the greasewood bush. When his eyes began to get into focus a few seconds later, Lawton was standing over him.

"YOU'RE going to back to your turn-out," he was saying. The truck-driver got slowly to his feet; he stood there looking into Lawton's eyes, and his own eyes were venomous. At length they dropped, and he started for the road in silence. When he got into the cab and shifted the lever to reverse, Lawton went to the sedan where Red waited.

"This," the latter said, "is the first time I've enjoyed myself since we came to Rust Water."

The backing took some time; and when it was completed, the sedan followed the truck into the side track. The humming of a motor sounded, and the roadster swept by; as it was passing them, it slackened and the girl leaned far out; they saw her slim young shoulders and her hair all tousled in the dry wind, the flash of her teeth as she smiled upon the two of them. They heard her voice above the purring of the engines:



"I wonder . . ." Lawton mused. He feigned sleep as the flashlight beam rested on him.

"Thank you." Then she was gone.

The truck-driver was gazing off into the sage-brush; apparently he had no wish to go into any further argument. Lawton heard Red saying:

"May as well go on?" He nodded, and when they had backed into the main road, he looked after the roadster; it was shrinking rapidly in the distance, but he could still see the dot of radiance where the sun shone on the driver's hair. They had gone a mile or two farther and turned off into the sheep-wagon road before he found his voice.

"High-pressure lads. Los Angeles and points East. You hit it right, Red. It takes a mining-rush to spoil the hills."

But Red's mind had gone to other matters, and instead of answering, he said: "With our late start and the lady in distress on top of that, we'd not make camp till dark. Better we stop over at Ball's corral and get rolling early in the morning." He pointed to a tiny triangle of green at the mouth of a cañon in the range of mountains at the eastern edge of the wide sage-brush flat. "That's it. In

the old days the mule-skinner had a feed station there."

The road which the sheep-wagons had made was not bad as roads go, and the sedan was averaging something like twenty-five miles an hour; but it was some time before the little verdant patch began to unfold any show of details; and the sun was below the western hills when they stopped before the old ranch-house.

The building stood behind a row of cottonwoods whose thick trunks attested to the age of the establishment; their branches were bending, and the dry murmur of their leaves arose like a protest against the wind which was sucking down the cañon. Two brindle dogs of dubious pedigree ceased scratching fleas and forsook the rickety front porch to make a venomous sortie against the visitors, but otherwise there was no sign of life about the place. Every evidence bespoke the slow but sure depreciation which comes with lack of use. It was not until Red and Lawton had unloaded their camp kit and were about to start cooking their evening meal that anyone appeared.

The tramp of a horse announced the presence of the newcomer; he had pulled up before the ranch-house porch and was swinging from the saddle, when the pair



"We'll talk this over outside,"
the Judge said.

turned to greet him—a big-boned man and wide of shoulder, with a skim of black stubble masking a jaw which set Lawton's mind groping for a befitting word; and he was muttering, "Trogodytic, that is it," when Red called, "Howdy, Ball."

There were two other things which Lawton noted as the sheepman answered the salutation. His arms were overlong, hanging almost to his knees, and his face held that peculiar vacuous expression which a stupid man shows when he is striving to think his way out of a tight place.

"YOU men," Ball said slowly, "can't camp here."

Lawton looked up, frowning. "You're not trying to tell us to move on, are you?"

Ball gazed at him for some moments as if he were turning over the matter in his mind, and then he evidently decided that so enormous a breach of custom would not be practical, for he shook his head.

"The idee is," he went on stolidly, "we had a fire las' month. And we don't want another. You'll have to go down by the crick." All the time that he was speaking, Lawton had the feeling that he was lying clumsily.

But there was a scattered grove of quaking aspens by the little stream, and the ground beside the banks was not moist enough for mosquitoes; so they

found the change all to their benefit, and when they had cooked their supper, the rancor, which had been irking them ever since their ejection from the bare ranch yard, was wearing off.

"Just the same," Red mused when they had stretched out on their blankets and lighted their cigarettes in the deepening dusk, "that talk of fires is plumb nonsense."

"He was lying," Lawton said. "I wonder why."

Within a few minutes the lacy canopy, which parted above them to show patches of starry sky, was blotted out; the music of the stream had ceased to reach their ears and they slept soundly.

It was so with Lawton for a good four hours, and then he awakened suddenly, clear of mind and certain that something unusual had aroused him. As he lay there gazing upward through the boughs of the quaking aspens at the irregular patches of black sky where the great desert stars were throbbing, he became conscious of the sound, a steady rhythmic drumming. It was—he knew it now—the beating of a motor. It occurred to him at first that it might be a plane passing far overhead, but in a moment it had drawn closer, and he recognized the engine of a heavy truck.

This spot whither Ball had banished them was a good two hundred yards from the bare beaten earth between the old ranch-house and the corral, where the so-called road passed. And it was forty



feet or more lower, with a fairly steep bit of hillside close by to shut out the view. So Lawton was not able even to see the lights of the oncoming truck. Only the sound of the motor proclaimed its approach, and, growing to a crescendo, betrayed its passing. Then the noise ceased abruptly.

"Some one stopping for gas or water," Lawton told himself. "I wonder—" He was still vaguely speculating as to why a car should be abroad at such an hour in this out-of-the-way place and whither it was going, and his musings were becoming blurred; he was about to follow the example of Red, whose heavy breathing made him envious, when he caught sight of a faint gleam through the branches of the wild-rose bushes on the bank above him. Then he was wide awake once more.

Wide awake, and sitting up. It was a sudden prudence, born of the desire to learn more about that approaching light, born of this and in part of the queer suspicion which had assailed him when he first saw the ranchman, that made him sink down again upon his pillow. And none too soon. His head had barely come to rest before the beam of a flashlight was shining in his face. He moved uneasily, and threw his arm across his eyes, as a man disturbed in the midst of his night's sleep. The beam traveled on, and presently the sound of receding footsteps came from the summit of the little hill.

For some moments Lawton lay there debating whether or not to rouse his companion. This he decided against at length, and having made certain that the light and its bearer had departed, he rose from his blankets, taking care to keep from making any sound. He slipped on his trousers and shoes, and he crept up the winding path which led toward the ranch-house.

Once as he was crawling on his hands and knees, it occurred to him, for no reason born of anything within his understanding, that it would be very easy for a man up there—if it should please such a one—to shoot him down and claim that the shot had been fired in the belief its target was some prowling animal. But this, he told himself, was drawing things altogether too fine. Because Ball had sent them away from the ranch-house vicinity, which he had every right to do, was no reason whatever for suspecting him of designs for murder. It was shortly afterward that his head came above the break of the little hill; he saw the headlights of the truck casting a long wedge-shaped patch of radiance within which many little dust-motes were dancing; and now and then a blundering night insect came speeding to dash itself against the lens. A large truck, and as Lawton looked, he saw that the hood was bright red. It was the same make as the truck which he had stopped on the road that afternoon. The voices of two men came from the darkness in the rear, and one of these was Ball. He was saying:

"These hills is getting too much populated." He repeated the last word as if he were proud of it. The driver's voice broke in on him:

"Okay. Okay. Let's get going." To Lawton this last voice seemed to hold a familiar quality, and as he was thinking so, the owner stepped around the truck, into the path of white radiance cast by the headlights. It was the sleek-haired young fellow upon whose jaw he had bruised the knuckles of his left hand the previous afternoon.

IT was broad daylight when Lawton awoke, and Red was bending over the little cooking-fire. When the latter had listened to the story, he shook his head.

"Maybe we'll see what it was they unloaded," he suggested; but when they went to their car, they found the imprints of the huge tires showing where the truck had backed to a weatherbeat-

en shed upon whose door a brand-new padlock stood forth in abrupt contrast to the old sun-bleached wood of the structure, whose mysteries it was protecting.

And so they set off an hour later for the Wild Rose Hills, no wiser than they had been when they first came to Ball's corral.

CHAPTER III

IT was just short of midnight when Sam Dolton, the newly appointed—and ill chosen—justice of the peace got into the little sedan, with its left side stained brown with tobacco-juice, and set forth from the raw young mining-camp of Rust Water. The road which he took was unmarked on the county maps; it was in fact the same pair of ruts in the sagebrush which Lawton and Red had followed some weeks before, but for reasons which the judge and two or three others were not publicizing, the slight tracks had recently become accentuated by fresh tire-marks. A tough road; and there were spots where one had to shift down along the grades; but it was good for an average of twenty-five miles an hour if one was accustomed to desert driving. Tonight, however, it happened that some specks of dust, which had worked into the feedline, managed to collect in the carburetor, and it was the hour before the dawn when Judge Dolton reached his destination, less than fifty miles away.

Here the unmapped road, which was carrying unheralded traffic, was starting to twine downward from the ridge along the eastern slope of the Wild Rose Hills. Above the summit of the next range some thirty-odd miles away, the dawn was beginning to bleach the clear summer sky. A speck of moving light showed on the slope two hundred feet above the spot where Judge Dolton was climbing from the driver's seat.

That little dot of radiance marked the portal of the Mohawk Mine. In decades which were forgotten by most people in the district now, the tunnel had disgorged rich ore; then the vein had pinched out, and thereafter the workings had remained a black, vacant hole, until the last few weeks. Now the mine was being operated again—or at any rate it was occupied; and if anyone had been curious enough to investigate, he would have found food for thought as to the nature

of the operations which were being carried on. Such a one, coming during the hours of daylight, would have been sure to see an army cot in the trench leading to the tunnel portal, and stretched out on this, a lank man of middle age. He wore khaki trousers and a light shirt of the same color, stained gray with dust, and one of those shapeless felt hats which explorers and cotton-farmers and sojourners in the hot desert hills use as a shield against the sun-glare. Usually he was immersed in one of those magazines which tell the heart-secrets of indiscreet women. That was all an investigator would find by way of activity in the daytime; but in the first three hours after midnight, if he happened along, he would see the speck of flashlight moving about up there, as soon as his presence became evident; and the chances are this is as far as his inquiry would progress.

From the road to the tunnel portal a narrow path ascended in a series of steep zigzags. Judge Dolton climbed it slowly; and when he had made about half the distance, the rays of the flashlight focused upon him, revealing his short legs and thick-set body, his large round face with the thin little slit of a mouth, and the eyes like two pinpoints of gray; revealing also the heavy sack of high-grade ore which he bore upon one shoulder. So for a moment the light rested, and then it was turned away.

It was some minutes later when Dolton climbed the dump of broken rock, and breathing heavily, set his burden on the ground. His jaws were working vigorously; he spat, and then he swore plaintively.

"You like to blind me with that flash, Walter," he said.

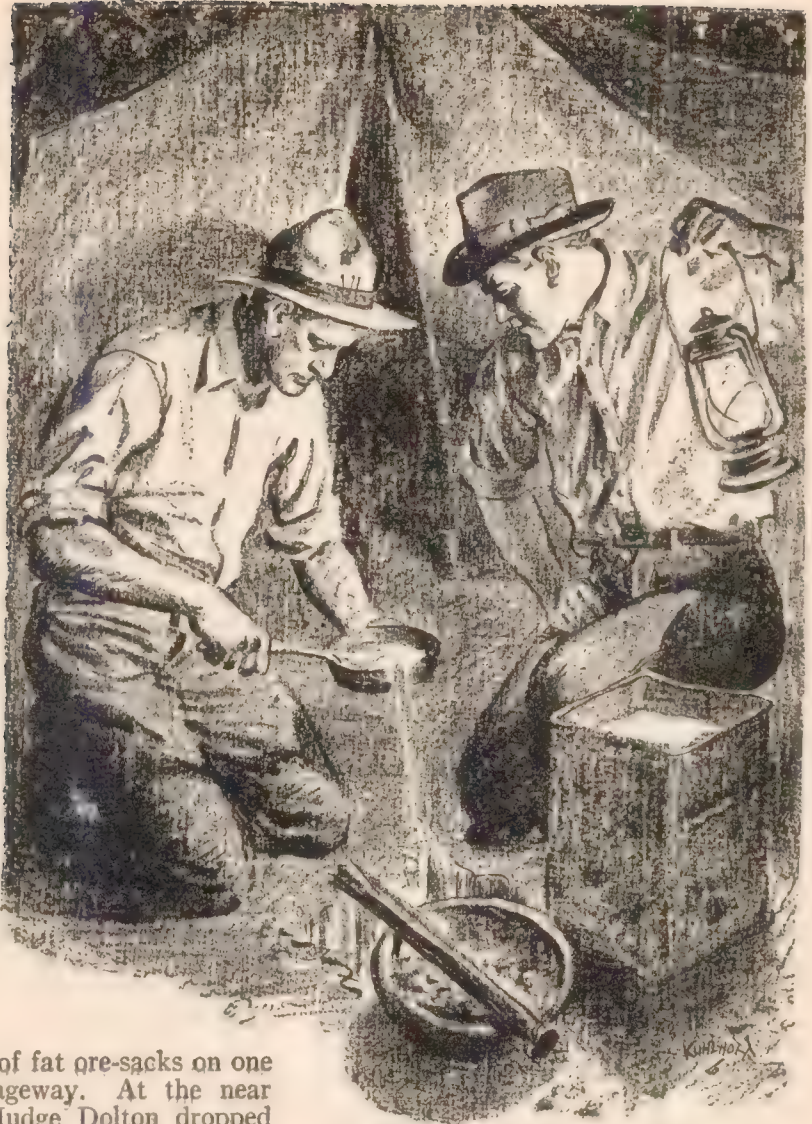
"You're late," the tall man told him. "Two hours and more. How did I know that it was you?"

There was something in his face that made the Judge look closer, and seeing the look, the guardian of the portal smiled; it was a wide smile, and it revealed several large yellow teeth, but there was no mirth in it.

"I got something inside to show you," he said.

THE justice of the peace picked up the sack and followed him into the tunnel. The flashlight wandered along the untimbered walls of broken rock, where little specks of mica glittered under its rays. The pair went for a hundred feet in silence. Then the yellow beam picked

"That will weigh nearly a dollar," said Red slowly, "and the stringer is widening."



up a double rank of fat pre-sacks on one side of the passageway. At the near end of the row Judge Dolton dropped his burden with a deep sigh of relief; he then looked about him, and his lips moved slowly as he counted.

Walter smiled again, unpleasantly. "Oh, they're all here," he said. The other ignored the implied reproach.

"What's this you're going to show me?" he asked.

By way of answer, the beam of the flashlight traveled inward along the drift. It went slowly for fifty feet or so, and as it proceeded, Walter's eyes hung on the face of his companion. Presently he saw the plump cheeks turn to a dull gray; the jaws ceased moving, and the little eyes became as hard as two specks of barren quartz.

"What do you make of that?" Walter's voice sounded hollow in the underground passageway.

The justice of the peace did not answer. He was regarding the spot where the circle of radiance had come to rest,

and his lips hung slack for just a moment. They went tight again.

"Hello, Martin!" His voice was as hard as his small eyes, and it was full of repressed exultation.

The man in the circle of radiance made no reply. He slumped against the tunnel wall, with his hands bound behind him and ropes securely confining his arms. The knots of other bonds showed at the ankles. He sat there motionless, but the effort to move was eloquently announced by the straining of the muscles beneath his flimsy shirt. His eyes were the only part of him that stirred. They roved from one of the pair who were regarding him to the other, two dark circles reflecting the flashlight's rays.

"He's hoist man at the Rust Water Con," the justice of the peace said.

Walter's smile revealed more yellow teeth as he replied:

"He was, you mean."

Judge Dolton's jaws resumed their former regularity of movement and he spat once more.

"We'll talk this over outside," he announced.

When they had reached the deep trench which led from the portal to the hill's rocky flank, they seated themselves on the cot whereon Walter was wont to spend his daylight hours perusing the confessions of women who loved unwisely and too well.

"It was a little after midnight when I heard his car climbing the hill on the other side of the ridge," Walter explained. "I went outside the tent and watched. He stopped a ways below your parking place. I s'pose he figgered I'd be asleep. All I had to do was wait till he was clost enough. Then I told him to put 'em up."

"He's been on the job less than two weeks," Dolton said. "Never asked any questions, and kep' to himself. We was figgering on having a talk with him before he went on night shift."

"Well, he must of been doing some thinking for himself," Walter stated thoughtfully. "The way I line it up, he would of got next to the high-grade that was going out, some way or other, and then he figgered on muscling in—or mebbe spilling what he knew to the company." His voice took on an aggrieved note. "I wisht you fellows had of handled him. Now we have got to kill him here. I don't like that."

"Not here." The justice of the peace shook his head. "These hills are getting lousy with prospectors the last few months. The chances are, it wouldn't be more'n a week before some feller would come along looking for stringers and uncover him."

"Speakin' of prospectors," Walter said, "there's two of 'em workin' on the other side of the ridge now, combing down the side hill."

JUDGE DOLTON rose. "Coming on day," he announced. "An hour and it'll be light. I tell you what. I'll beat it back to town. Tonight I'll come for him. Leave him be till I show up."

"And what'll we do about his car?" Walter asked. "We don't want it found near this place."

"I'll have to take a chance on that," Judge Dolton answered after a few moments' thought. "I'll tow it as far as Ball's corral this morning." He started

down the hill but when he had gone a few paces he halted and called back:

"Those two prospectors on the other side—you better keep an eye on them."

CHAPTER IV

THE sun climbed over the mountains in the east, and the light crept down the long slopes of the Wild Rose Hills, until the portal of the tunnel only remained enshadowed, a black patch against a glowing background. As the morning grew toward fullness, Walter put away his magazine and turned from the world where lawless lovers always managed to keep just within the postal regulations. He rose from his army cot, yawned and shook himself. It was the desire for a bit of variety, rather than any idea of complying with Judge Dolton's parting injunction, that prompted him to climb to the summit and have a look at the two prospectors.

They were there, all right, far below him on the glowing slope which slanted on to the remote sage-dotted plain, a pair of tiny forms, seeming more like a child's toys than live men. Walter lay within a deep crevasse, where a swarthy dyke of lava had split in cooling, and gazed at them for some moments. If he had been a stranger to the ways of these desert hills he would have been hard put to it to understand what they were doing, but he had watched prospectors many times before.

At last he shook his head.

"Digging pot-holes in the hot sun!" His voice was filled with scorn. "Cracking your heels hunting for colors! And if you ever make a strike, some wise guy comes along and buys you out for a few hundred dollars." He turned and went back down the hill to his tent, for it was getting on toward time to cook his midday meal.

It was several hours later and the shadows of the afternoon were growing deeper; the eastern flanks of the hills were taking on a mantle of changing grays and purples when the monotony of solitude drove him to the ridge again. This time his eyes showed a greater interest in what lay below.

The nature of the work had changed; the pair were not digging now; they were on their hands and knees and one of them was wielding a prospector's pick. The sound of the blows came to the watcher, faint with distance and delayed; so that,

when his eyes were following the upward movement of the man's arm, his ears were receiving the thud which had preceded it.

"So you've put the ore in place." The scorn which had been in his voice that morning was still there but the light of awakened interest grew stronger in his eyes. "Now I wonder—"

His mental processes were none too swift, but they were beginning to turn toward possibilities. He groped in his pocket and brought forth a packet of cigarettes; slowly he took one out and lighted it. . . .

Here on the surface where the stringer showed it was barely the width of a man's thumb. Just a strip of rock, stained by the weather to the color of the broken bits of stone which covered the greasewood-dotted slope. Where the blows of the little sharp-pointed pick had shattered it, the difference showed. Red Murdoch ceased his labor for a moment; he rubbed his arm across his forehead, wiping away the beads of sweat, and picked up a fragment which he had chipped from the narrow vein; he tossed it to Lawton. He nodded.

"We'll make a panning now."

Lawton looked at the little piece of rock; then he raised his eyes and gazed at the wide hillside.

"Talk about searching for a needle in a haystack," he said.

"But the needle doesn't throw colors," Red reminded him.

RISING slowly from his knees, Lawton flexed his legs to relieve the ache; he wondered how many times he had endured that pain in getting to his feet during the last few weeks. His gaze traveled along the wide slopes to the northward. He was thinking of the time they had been spending, combing down the glowing ridges and the swales between them; the long days under the hot sun, digging holes in stony ground, carrying water from the distant gulches, panning the broken rubble, every pan with the same care, as if it were the one which would reward their quest; scanning the angle, where the side and the bottom of the pan joined, for the sight of one tiny golden flake.

The patience and the skill and the hard work. The optimism which never lets discouragement come to the searcher. Three times they had found colors: First just a single minute fleck of yellow, then two or three, and then others.

But always, when they followed the trace up the hillside, it disappeared; and there had been no sign of ore. So many times his hopes had risen, only to die again! But he recalled with growing admiration how Red had never changed. It was as though the conviction which had led his companion to these rocky hills was absolute, beyond the power of recurring failures to alter it in the slightest.

Red was bending over the vein again, assailing it with his pick. He looked around long enough to say, "These tight little stringers don't throw much color, that's a fact."

BELOW them on the hillside several dark spots stood forth against the background of broken rubble, the pot-holes which they had delved, following the trace as it led them upward—until the colors which they yielded had vanished. That was a few yards above the spot where Red was working now. An hour or so ago. And, when he had read the barren verdict of the last pan he had nodded.

"We're getting hot this time." So he had said, and now he had proved his judgment to be right. He had justified the inflexible optimism which had led him here and kept him tolling all these weeks.

Lawton brought the water in a five-gallon oil tin whose upper half had been cut away, and with it the little frying-pan. He watched Red fill this with fragments which had broken from the stringer; and when the last particles had been washed away, he saw a narrow golden streak standing forth against the pan's dull surface. His heart took a jump then but all Red said was:

"We've got time to do some trenching this afternoon."

Here at the surface the rock was split and loosened by the age-long erosions of wind and winter snow and occasional summer cloudbursts. They went to work with pick and shovel and spelled each other at half-hour intervals, for the sun was punishing.

They labored on, as day drew toward evening and the shadows began creeping upward from the long sage-dotted flatlands; faint veils of amethyst were hovering over the ridges, and the hollows were turning purple by the time they had uncovered the vein at a depth of a yard or so. It had widened from less than an inch to more than a foot and the



Nancy
Henry

color had changed; it stood out against the brown wall rock, a deep gray-black. Its texture had hardened. The cracks were no longer evident to the eye. Murdoch took samples from its face.

He chipped them out with his prospector's pick, four from each side and four down the middle, covering the exposed surface. It was now dusk. "Call it a day," he announced.

Where the bare hills folded to a gully which traveled upward from the flats, splitting into three forks about halfway to the summit, their tent showed, a gleaming speck of white in the surrounding twilight. They lighted the lantern and the canvas walls glowed like a patch of molten metal. Within there were two cots at the rear, and near the front the sheet-iron stove. A cool wind seeped down the gulch, and by the time they had the fire of sage-brush roaring, they were grateful for its warmth. It was not until they had finished supper and had the dishes done that Red took the samples and went to work on them.

HE washed out the iron mortar. "Just to be sure," he said, "it isn't salted." Then he threw the chunks of ore into it and used the shank end of a two-foot steel drill to pound them up. It took some time to reduce them to a powder, which he sifted into the little frying-pan. Lawton stood beside him looking over his shoulder while he did the panning, dipping the skillet into the water, swishing the contents gently with a rotating movement whose smoothness never varied, tipping the small container at

intervals to let the fluid carry off the pulverized rock—until at last the fox-tail remained, a streak of golden flakes, spreading wider as it extended from its apex, spanning a good quarter of the pan's circumference.

"That will weigh nearly a dollar," Red's voice was grave. He rose to his feet and straightened his back. He gazed down upon the foxtail in the pan. "I was dead sure," he added quietly, "the first time I saw these hills."

Lawton breathed deeply; it seemed to him as if it was the first time he had allowed himself to draw a breath since Red had begun the panning. Through the joy that was beginning to take possession of him with the realization that this was true, there came to him a re-awakened admiration for the solidity of his companion's conviction. He was thinking that it was men like this who made his own profession possible.

"And that stringer is widening." Red was speaking slowly now. "There will be others too, close by." He went over to one of the cots and sat down on its edge. "There aint slope enough to tunnel up there. We've got to sink a shaft, then drift to contact. It's going to take money."

LAWTON came and sat beside him. "How much?" he asked.

"There'll be more trenching when we find the other stringers." Red was speaking as if there had been no interruption, following the trend of his own thoughts. He looked into Lawton's eyes and he smiled. "I'm a prospector. At this stage of the game, it's time to look for outside capital."

"And let the other fellow get the gravy." Lawton shook his head. "I have an idea that beats yours. I can drive to town and go to work there. They're needing miners. Two weeks or so, maybe a month, until we're able to proceed on a production basis."

The other was silent for some moments. Then he nodded. "Okay. We'll handle this ourselves. And, if the vein is consistent, the way I judge it should be, you and I are going to town, right! We're in the money. It's a real strike. As big as Rust Water. And right at the grass roots. When do you go?"

"May as well start tonight." Lawton rose and smiled down on his companion. "Sooner I leave, the quicker I start earning wages."

Red returned his smile.

"I'll hold her down, then—two weeks, a month perhaps. Then we're sitting pretty."

On the other side of the ridge Walter's tent made a spot of orange on the mountain-side. The rays of the lantern shone down upon him as he bent over the little frying-pan which he had been twirling, not so skillfully as Murdoch had been handling his a short time before, but the showing of golden flakes which hung there was large enough to make him swear under his breath. He was thinking how near he had been to resisting the impulse which had led him downward from his watching-place after the two prospectors had departed from their camp. And how, even when he was picking up the fragments from the shallow trench, he had reproached himself for being a fool in coming here to the spot. It was one of the few times he could remember in his life that he had allowed curiosity to get the upper hand of his laziness.

"And now," he reflected, "all I have got to do is sit tight. Stick here and tend to business. And keep an eye on them two down there. Until they do their trenching. Then, if she keeps on showing like she is now, I'll do a little claim-jumping."

CHAPTER V

JUST before Lawton pulled out that evening, Red reminded him that the gas was getting low.

"You'll have to stop at Ball's corral," he said, "and get enough to last you to town. They may have some mail for us. I left word at the Rust Water post-office that we'd be in the Wild Rose Hills, and Ball's is the jumping-off place."

The stars were glowing in the fullness of splendor which they attain above the Nevada hills in late summer when Lawton drove down the winding gully, but when he reached the wide sage-brush flat two miles away he noticed a black strip that hung along the western horizon, obliterating the sharp outlines of the range of mountains ahead of him. And as he looked, a gleam of lightning illuminated the whole of the ragged skyline, making the lava peaks stand out in sharp black relief against its glare. He had traveled in the arid reaches of the great intermountain plateau in other years and he knew the savageness of its rare summer rainstorms which might bring floods to the low country.

"I hope that thunderhead doesn't hit the range before I get through," he reflected and stepped on the accelerator. The road was not so bad considering the fact that it was an ungraded track, marked out originally by sheep wagons traveling into the winter range, for the travel thus far had been confined to light cars and it was free from the ambushes of deep ruts. But there were occasional surprises, in the way of sharp turns and steep little gullies. He had plenty to do, watching its windings; and the discovery, which they had made this afternoon upon the hillside which he was leaving behind him, was giving his fancy abundant fields in which to rove. While one part of his mind was busily engaged in noting the various small emergencies which kept confronting him, demanding quick shifts of the steering-wheel and changes of speed, the other part was wandering from visions of a golden streak in the bottom of a little frying-pan into the future; it was seeing pictures of the mine which was to be; the power-house where the compressor throbbed, the gaunt head-frame rising above the shaft collar, the roaring air-drills at the faces of the underground passages, the ore rattling from the skip into the bin. It was not until he reached the foot of the grade which led to the summit of the range that he became conscious of the gathering storm again.

Now the air was sultry and the rumble of the thunder had become more imminent; it was constantly assailing his ears above the humming of the engine. The road grew narrower and the loose rocks along it compelled him to shift down into second gear. The car climbed on, and when it reached the wide swale between two lava-capped peaks at the summit, several large drops of rain struck the windshield. There was not a breath of wind.

FOR a while Lawton followed the windings of a side-hill dug-way down the western slope. He had a glimpse of the tops of quaking aspens in the cañon below him, revealed by a glare of lightning, the leaves hanging motionless. Beads of moisture were forming on his brow, his shirt was wet with perspiration.

"It looks as if I were going to get my gas and make the flat before the rain comes," he told himself, and let the speed pick up a little. So he came down at a good twenty-five miles an hour, and—he recalled the fact afterward when he

had an opportunity to look back upon the thing that happened to him at the bottom of the hill—the truck which was standing in the bare space of beaten earth down there below him between the old ranch-house and the scattered out-buildings by the corral, had its engine idling. It was the noise of that motor, even more than his own speed, which made his arrival catch the men at Ball's corral completely by surprise.

THE first bright revelation of the headlights picked out four of them. In the instant of his discovery, they became aware that he was here. Two of the party were standing beside a dusty little sedan, which was stopped in the middle of the roadway, fifty feet or so away from the ranch-house door. It seemed to Lawton during the instant while the lamps shone upon them, that his eyes had caught them in the completion of effort, as if perhaps they had unloaded something into the rear of the car and were straightening out their bodies after relieving themselves of their burden. But this was so swiftly come and so quickly finished by the shifting of the lights, as Lawton's car swung from the rounding of the last curve into a steep straight pitch downward, that it was only a bare impression. The other two men were standing before the dilapidated wooden veranda which fronted the ranch-house door.

Lawton shoved down the foot-brake and eased his car downward; he brought it to a stop by the sedan. The rear door which had been hanging wide a moment ago was closed now. One of the pair, who stood beside it, stepped over toward him, blocking his view; but he was sure that he had seen a man in the back seat, and that there was something unusual—just what it was he did not know, but it was something which gave him a queer uneasy feeling—in the posture of this one. It was Ball who had come so abruptly to confront Lawton. He thrust his head close to the open window. He said:

"Well, what do you want?" There was an emphasis on the pronoun which was unmistakable, and then, as if regretting this show of hostility he added more quietly: "Pull over there by the house. I'll be with you in a second." His heavy face was bloodless and, although his voice had been belligerent at first, the lips were working; he passed his tongue across them while he was speaking. Of the other man who stood behind him

Lawton had only a bare glimpse; he was a short-legged man, full faced, and his eyes were like two pin-points of gray, with the light of fear shining upon them.

"I want to get some gas." Uneasiness had sharpened Lawton's voice.

"All right! All right! Pull over to the house." Ball stepped back beside his companion and the pair completely hid the rear windows of the sedan. Lawton started on and, as he made the turn, his headlights shone on the truck. Its hood was trembling to the motor's vibrations. The dust of the desert lay thickly upon its body and on the load which it was carrying, but during the moments while his eyes rested upon it, he saw enough to recognize the nature of the cargo and surprise took possession of him then.

A huge steel drum and several large sheets of copper. These things he picked out and he was wondering whether there had been some new developments in the district which would warrant the building of a mill away out here to handle ore. For the drum and the copper plates were part of the equipment of a ball mill.

One of the pair on the porch was busy with a bit of dirty rag, swabbing the floor boards, when Lawton brought the car to a stop. The man straightened up and flung the cloth away into the darkness; the glare of the headlights caught it before it vanished and showed a patch of deep red upon it. There was something of the same uneasiness in the faces of the two men which had showed in the pair by the sedan. They nodded in answer to Lawton's greeting, and replying briefly, averted their eyes at once.

By the time Lawton had got out, Ball was coming toward them. His surliness had departed; no floorwalker in a cheap department store where trade was poor had ever exhibited a more patent desire to smooth over a bad situation than he was showing now. His face was a dull gray, shining with perspiration, and the big hand which he laid upon Lawton's arm was trembling a little.

"YOU caught me all het up, Mister. There's been more business tonight than I had in the last month." There was something in his clumsy attempt at ingratiation which was more repellent than his former curtness.

A dazzling flash of lightning on the heights reminded Lawton of his need for haste and, when the crash of thunder which followed had subsided, he turned toward Ball.

"Just put five gallons in the tank." Then, recalling Red's injunction as to the mail, he added, "I wonder if there are any letters here for us."

"Letters. Oh, sure." The heavy face lighted as with sudden relief. "You better come inside and have a look. There's a bunch of mail in the front room."

HE led the way and lighted a kerosene lamp. Lawton looked about him. In years gone by the ranch house had been a station for the jerk-line teams, and the long table where the mule-skinners had eaten their meals still occupied a major portion of the constricted space. On the walls were a few fading evidences of a family's occupation during those days, a framed photograph of a man and woman, a colored print of a stag at bay, and over the door one of those familiar old mottoes, worked out in tinted yarn. It said: "*God Bless Our Home.*" But all of these were merely remnants; the floor was bare; there was a bunch of branding-irons in one corner and the clothless table was strewn with masculine odds and ends: a pair of hobbles, a half-empty bottle of liquor, several large-caliber rifle-cartridges, some dusty specimens of ore. Ball had stepped to the front window and was drawing down the tattered shades; it took some time before he had them snug enough for his satisfaction. When he was done:

"You'll find the mail on the shelf."

He nodded toward one of those old what-nots of carved walnut which were in vogue a half a century ago, and departed with an abruptness which was as puzzling as his former trepidation. The door banged shut behind him and Lawton was walking toward the bracket whereon a thin sheath of envelopes showed dimly in the lamp's yellow light, when he heard the faint rasp of a key.

He went to the door and tried it silently. It was locked! Then his eyes went to the other entrance leading to a back room and he realized that there was still a way out; he was not imprisoned; they had, for some reason of their own, merely seen fit to shut him off from another unexpected appearance out there in front. He glanced at the drawn shades and, for a moment, he was sorely tempted to pull one of them aside, but the idea of spying on their activities failed to appeal; he shrugged his shoulders and went back to the mail.

While he was scanning the addresses on the soiled envelopes, he heard the



"... make a slaughterhouse out of the place!" That was Ball's voice.

hum of a motor. He had finished looking them over and found none for him or Red; and he was standing there with the sheaf of letters in his hand, debating whether it would not be the wiser course to make some demonstration, if for no other reason at least to let them know that he was aware of the thing which they had done, when he caught the sound of voices out by the entrance.

IT was, at first, a mere indistinguishable buzzing, as if several men were speaking in low tones; and when this had been going on for some moments, one of the voices was raised above the rest; he caught the words distinctly:

"—make a slaughterhouse out of the place! I aint going to stand for it."

That was Ball's voice. It died down as abruptly as it had risen and the murmuring of the others ceased. The sound of a second motor, some distance away this time, came to Lawton's ears. He was wondering whether, by any chance, those words to which he had listened had



been concerned with him, and the feeling of uneasiness which had been upon him ever since he had come to the place, was crystallizing into an ugly premonition; he was looking about the room in search of something which he could use as a weapon, when the faint rasp of the key sounded again; the door was flung open. Ball stood on the threshold.

"What's the idea of this? Locking me in?" Lawton asked sharply.

Ball gazed at him for a moment in dull silence. Then he said, "You're crazy. The door was stuck."

"Stuck—" Lawton took a step toward him, and then he shrugged, for he saw two men standing behind the rancher.

"The house is settling," Ball said. "That gas will be three dollars, Mister."

While Lawton was paying the money he saw the glow of a red tail-light receding where the road went down to the wide flat lands. The man with the short legs had vanished and, with him, the dusty sedan; his own car was standing near the spot where the latter had been.

"A good place to get away from," he told himself as he took his seat and jammed his foot down on the starting-pedal.

CHAPTER VI

NOW thunder was cracking like big artillery in the heights behind him; the lightning was so bright that there were times when the pathway which his headlamps cast before him was drowned out in a white glare that showed the sage-dotted plain below and a range of saw-toothed peaks in the distance behind the new camp of Rust Water. Lawton was sorting out the items in the last quarter of an hour's queer chain of events, placing them in the order in which they had occurred, trying to understand the meaning which might lie beneath them.

The dusty sedan in the middle of the road before the old ranch-house, the silent figure slumped in the rear seat, the truck with its load of mill equipment in the out of the way neighborhood, where the nearest approach to mining was the scratching of prospectors, the fear written so plainly in Ball's face and the averted eyes.

It was then that he remembered, for the first time since he had seen it, the cloth which the man had thrown out into the darkness after he had finished wiping the floor of the narrow porch.

That struck him now, the strangeness of such a show of cleanliness on the part of any of this group; scrubbing a dirty ranch-house porch in the middle of the night was certainly an unusual proceeding. And that patch of red which he had seen before the rag vanished in the gloom! It tailed in altogether too well with the fragment of talk which he had overheard from outside the door while he was waiting in the locked room—

"—make a slaughterhouse out of the place! I aint going to stand for it."

THINGS had been breaking so swiftly heretofore, and his own reactions to what he had seen and heard had been so tinctured with an impatience born of his desire to be getting on, that he had missed much of their real significance. Now he was beginning to have a feeling that perhaps he had been in a tighter spot than he had realized. Certainly that phrase which he had caught had but one meaning.

"—make a slaughterhouse out of the place." He wondered whether it had been rebellion, against the addition of his blood to other blood already spilled, which had brought that outburst from Ball.

The idea seemed too enormous for acceptance. He had been in more than one ugly situation during his years of knocking about mining-camps in the out of the way places of the West. And the natural contempt which a man, who has tasted the hot savor of violent action, feels for any dread born of imagination began to assert itself. Probably there was something doing back there. Something outside the law. There were always such things going on in the neighborhood of new strikes, and the country about here was undoubtedly getting the inevitable sprinkling of hard characters who flock after every discovery of gold. He could find a dozen answers to his

question as to what lay behind the activities which he had glimpsed; but as fast as he found one there always came an objection which was too logical to cast aside. And there still remained, defying answer, the presence of the truck with its load of mill machinery.

There was something else that would not depart; a sense of uneasiness, which grew as he drove onward, instead of diminishing with distance from the ranch house. It hung over him, as if its cause were here, in the car, close by; as if he could reach back of him and touch it.

Then the rain came, and he had no time to devote to further speculations.

He had come down the long easy grade which led from the mouth of the cañon where the ranch-house stood behind the row of cottonwoods and he was well out on the flat lands when the heavens opened. For the first few minutes the huge drops fell so thickly that the noise drowned the sound of the motor. Then of a sudden the uproar swelled; there were no longer any drops; the water was descending in solid sheets; it poured down with a deep sullen thunder which seemed to make the earth tremble and shook the air like the booming of an enormous cataract. It was as if the clouds had burst.

Now all his senses, save his tortured hearing, were overwhelmed beneath the savage assault of the unleashed elements. The wind-shield showed as a faint blur before him and, beyond it there was nothing visible. The road might as well have been a hundred miles away, so completely had it vanished.

SO, for a quarter of an hour, and after that the first lull intervened; he saw a cloud of spray rising from the churning wheels hiding the engine's hood; he caught the faint gleam of the headlights through it; they were shining on a wide expanse of water. The plain had become a lake, above whose surface the clumps of sage arose. Then the sky turned loose another deluge.

He had shifted down the gears; and he was holding the speed to less than ten miles an hour. At times he stopped, awaiting the recession of an opaque downpour, or when a sudden lurching of the car warned him of some unseen obstacle which the wheels had met. At such moments, while he was turning aside to avoid a heavy bunch of sagebrush, or backing away from a boulder,

he was using all his wits to hold such sense of direction as remained with him. For there were no landmarks now; nothing but that expanse of water stippled by the torrent into a myriad of wavelets, with the black patches of the sage rising above its troubled surface.

Then the car climbed out of the flood upon a bit of higher ground and Lawton brought it to a stop. He had been driving by dead reckoning for a long time and the speedometer told him he had gone ten miles. If he had held near to his proper course he knew the junction of this by-track and the main road, which led from the graveled highway into Rust Water, must lie seven or eight miles ahead of him. He kept the motor idling, for he realized the danger of dampness which would come if he were to shut off the power, and he waited for the downpour to cease. Another half hour passed; the lulls were beginning to grow longer, the savage outbursts which intervened were losing a little of their fury; and then, as suddenly as it had come, the storm was past.

HE noticed, as he started on again, that the island had shrunk to half its size; and before he had gone a mile he saw that the water on the flats was growing deeper. The run-off from the hills was raising its level here on the lowlands. More than once the car plunged into a pool which lapped the running-board. He shifted the gear-lever down to low and decreased his speed, centering all his faculties on the wavering pathway of light before him, for if he allowed the car to be stalled in one of these depressions, the chances of his getting out before daylight would be slim indeed.

He had been feeling his way in this manner for a long time—too long, it seemed to him—and the headlamps revealed no sign of the wide expanse of ruts leading to town. He told himself that he could not have crossed the main road, for he would have felt the jolt of those deep ruts. But he might have swerved from his true course a half-dozen times or more; and one change to the wrong direction would have sent him off on a tangent whereon he would never have reached his objective. He thrust his head far out of the window, searching the sky for stars, peering off into the gloom for some small landmark which would tell him where he was. But the clouds still hung thick overhead; they hid the dark outline of the distant hills.

The uncomfortable feeling which comes to a man when he suspects that he is lost was upon him now. He stopped the car again. And as he sat peering into the night, uneasiness took possession of him. The fine hairs were stirring on the back of his neck, as if something in the blackness, something so near that he could reach behind him and touch it with his hand, were making its presence felt. It was with an effort that he restrained himself from turning on the dome light and looking for an unseen rider. Perhaps he would have yielded to the impulse if he had not heard a woman scream.

THE voice came out of the darkness which closed in where the pathway of radiance from the head-lamps ended. He had the car door open and was on the running-board when the cry was repeated. He leaped into the water and it rose to his knees. Then he saw the ripple of a current sweeping by him and the outlines of two ridges of soaked earth enclosing it on either side.

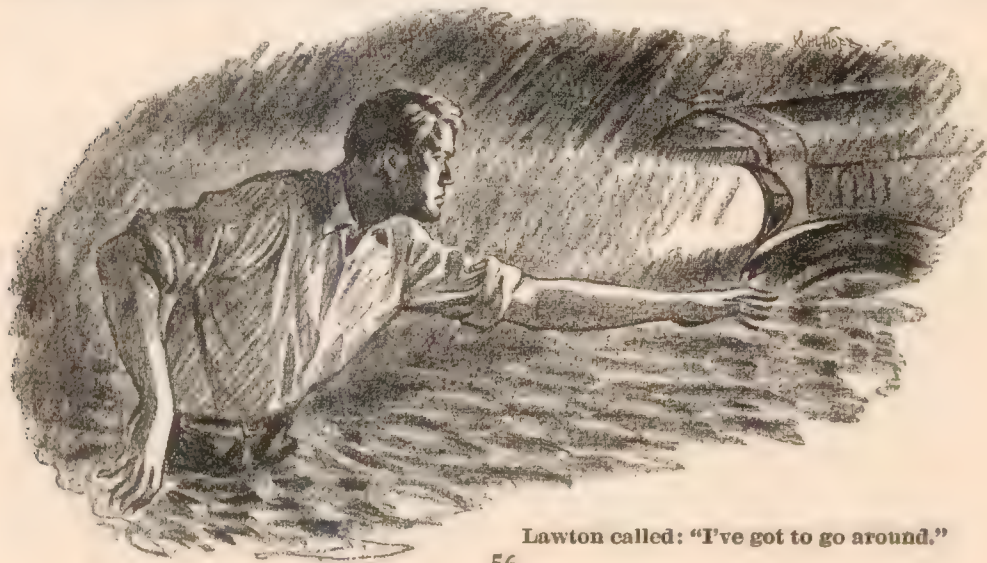
He had stopped at the very edge of the road, and one of the deeper ruts had been transformed into a stream. The land sloped downward here. He plunged on, and once when his feet found a hidden groove which the wheels of passing traffic had dug, he pitched forward and barely saved himself from falling. Now the current on the flooded road quickened and he heard the booming of a torrent in the gloom. He remembered the spot; the woman's cry which he had heard must have come from a gully which had cut its way from the hills into the flat lands.

A sudden thickening in the gloom warned his keyed-up senses just in time;

it was awakened instinct that made him halt here, upon the brink. The approach to the bed of the gulch had been cut away and the bank dropped sheer before him. Through the uproar of the flood beneath him he could hear the sucking murmur of the current and the dull *plump* of a mass of earth that fell into the stream. He called at the top of his voice. The cry came out of the night once more in answer and then a spot of light showed ahead of him. It moved swiftly, describing a wide arc in the blackness, sweeping downward until it showed a space of coffee-colored water, swirling by, patterned with streaks of dirty froth. It settled to rest upon him.

He slid down the bank. The water rose about his waist; he felt its grip, like a huge cold hand tugging at his limbs. He fought to keep his footing, leaning against the sucking current; and as he went on, holding his eyes upon the light, he became aware of the dark bulk of a closed car; he saw the gleaming of the wind-shield reflecting a sudden movement of the light. There was a sick moment when the waters swirled against his chest; one of his feet slipped on the soapy clay bottom; he flung himself out of the depths into which he had stumbled and, as he came forth his fingers were clutching the metal handle on the car door.

While he hung there getting his footing, he had a glimpse of a large sedan, turned broadside to the flood, and of a girl crouching on the driver's seat. The door was on the upstream side; he turned the knob and threw his whole weight into the effort to pull it open; he might as well have tried to lift the car from the spot where it was resting. He called:



Lawton called: "I've got to go around."

"I've got to get around to the other side," and he started, feeling his way along the engine's hood. The current swept him against the fender with a force that all but took the breath from his body. It was then that he realized the flood must have come upon her when she was driving across the gully; it must have come so suddenly that she had no time to get out, trapping her in the sedan. And, even as he was making his way to the downstream side, its depth was increasing. He was familiar with these desert cloudbursts; he knew that his safety and that of the girl was hanging in a narrow balance; that the time was brief, a matter of moments before those swirling waters would engulf them both and carry them away.

He reached the front wheels and his hand found the metal ornament on the radiator cap; he clung to it with desperation while he eased himself around to the other side. The force of the current was not so great here. He was able to stagger to the door without seeking support now. The flashlight moved as he seized the knob and he could see the figure moving within; the beam fell upon her face. It was the girl whom he and Red had met that afternoon a few weeks ago when they were driving out from Rust Water.

The current seized the door and flung it against him with a force that nearly knocked him from his feet. He reached inside, dragged her out and threw her over his shoulder as if the burden were a sack of ore. He called:

"Hold the light ahead of us, so I can see." Then he started for the bank.

AS he reached the spot where he had been near to disaster a few moments before, the water rose above his armpits; and it was only her weight that saved him from being swept away. He faced upstream, breasting the current's force, and he felt his legs giving way beneath him. He was sobbing with the effort when he struggled out into the shallows. A minute later he was climbing the bank.

He took the flashlight from her hand and his fingers touched hers. They were as cold as ice. But her eyes were steady; she was smiling bravely.

"This is the second time you've come to me when I was in trouble," she said.

"It's you." Lawton was conscious of the eagerness in his voice. It was the first time he realized how often he had

thought of her since she had leaned across the door of her little roadster as she passed them in the sand-dunes that afternoon weeks before, and called her thanks. Until this moment of their recognition he had not known how he had been looking forward to seeing her again. His work had taken him into the out-of-the-way places, in the mountains and the desert, where women were usually in the minority and men made much of them, but his encounters with them had been for the most part casual and they had left no sentimental impressions—until that time on the one-way road when he had watched her vivid hair until it was a glowing speck in the hot sunshine. Now he remembered how often her face had come before him during the days while he was bending his back on the sage-dotted hill-sides, during the soft, mellow evenings while he was lying in his blankets before the tent in the narrow gulch.

HER head was bare, and her hair aflame under the rays of the flashlight; the color had returned to her cheeks; her face was tanned by the desert sun and the wide gray eyes were meeting his own frankly. She was not what he would have called a pretty girl; there was something more engaging than that in her features; it was a vividness that made him catch his breath.

She was wearing a sport-skirt and her light blouse was open at the throat; he could see the wet garments clinging to her limbs. He could feel the coldness of the night seeping through his own sodden clothing. Half an hour of this, he told himself, and she would be chilled to the bone. The gulch lay between them and the town; the flood would be running deep down there for three or four hours; then it would recede as rapidly as it had come. It was a good twenty-five miles to the nearest ranch-house as the road ran, and all of the distance lay across the flooded flats. He heard himself saying:

"I've got to get you to some shelter where I can build a fire."

"There's a place within half a mile," she told him, "where the old road used to make the crossing."

He nodded. "I'm going to carry you to the car." She started to make some remonstrance but he did not wait to hear it; he picked her up in his arms, and as he stumbled through the water which had risen above his knees, he was conscious of the lightness of his burden, of her softness, pressing close against his body.

When they reached the car he placed one foot on the running-board and held her with one arm while he unlatched the door.

"My bed-roll is in the back. I'll get a blanket for you to wrap yourself," he offered. But she shook her head.

"I can make out as I am. No use losing time. I'm beginning to get anxious for that fire."

AFTERWARD, when he thought back on this little incident, he wondered how things might have turned out if he had obeyed his impulse to pay no heed to her remonstrance and rummage in the rear of the car then. But he did not do it, and so he had no suspicion of the revelation which was awaiting the two of them. His mind was all on her as he slid into his place beside her on the driving seat. And when they started on:

"You seem to know this country pretty well," he remarked.

"I was raised here." She caught his quick glance toward her; it was her slip into the vernacular of the desert hills—that and her knowledge of the locality—which brought the look. She laughed and she added quickly, "I've been away at school, six years, but whenever I come back to the sage-brush I find myself going native."

It explained something which had been vaguely puzzling him—a discrepancy that he had noticed; it was not in her speech alone. There were the two expensive cars, the little roadster and the sedan down in the gulch; there were her clothes: the bedraggled sport-skirt was up-to-date—he knew enough about women's dress to be sure of that; and there were many small things, in her manner and her speech, which would have been in place in San Francisco or Los Angeles but did not belong out here. And on the other hand, there was her quick acceptance of their situation; it had a frankness which was not altogether that of the Twentieth Century, a deeper frankness, more sincere than that of modern sophistication. It smacked of the same readiness to bestow confidence which Red Murdoch had shown, that evening when they had met in the crowded barroom at Indio. Now Lawton understood. Six years away at school and she had returned to the desert hills which were her home. He liked her the better for this. . . . Her voice brought his mind back to the driving.

"Bear to the left a little more. It should be close by now."

Then he caught sight of a low building ahead of them, a long shed, unpainted, the boards were warped by the sun and the dry wind. It had three sides and, near by, there were the remnants of an old circular corral. The land lay higher here and it was comparatively dry.

"It used to be a freight-station in the days of the old mule-teams," she told him. "The house was burned a few years ago."

By good luck the open side of the shed lay to the leeward and there were enough dry odds and ends of wood to get a fire going. She stood beside the flames while he gathered more fuel to feed them, and the steam rose about her in a thin cloud.

"This skirt is ruined." She looked over her shoulder at him as she made the announcement and she smiled. "It will give me a good excuse to wear overalls." He threw an armful of dry wood upon the fire; the flames leaped higher, throwing a huge shower of sparks, widening the circle of light until this revealed the car at the other end of the long shed. Lawton watched her for a moment before he asked a question which had been in his mind for some time.

"You live in Rust Water?"

"I camped there before the town was ever dreamed of. It was with my father, one night four years ago. The wild horses came down to the spring and kept us awake until nearly morning." She sighed. "You know, I sometimes wish they'd never found the ore. These hills are getting spoiled."

"My partner made the same remark," he told her. "It was that afternoon we saw you on the road. He doesn't like the crowd in the camp."

"Nor I." She was frowning. And she remained silent for a few moments gazing out into the night beyond the circle of radiance which surrounded the fire. Then she seemed to pull herself together and she let her eyes come back to him. "You're prospecting, I reckon. I noticed the outfit in your car that afternoon." She smiled in her quick way. "I had time for that, although you did work fast with the truck-driver."

"YES; we're over in the Wild Rose range," he answered and went on to tell her the story from the time when he had first met Red Murdoch. When he came to their discovery she cried:

"That's fine. I wish you luck. And lots of it. You know, my father always

said that country over there was rich. He was dead sure of it. He'd have gone into the district himself, I think, if he hadn't gotten the Rust Water Con."

"SO," Lawton said, "your father is Jim Henry."

"I was taking it for granted you knew that. Yes, I am Nancy Henry." And when Lawton had told her his name she went on:

"Ever since I was a little girl, I've known these hills. We used to live down on the Humboldt then, and my father had sheep; his winter range was out this way. But it was the mineral that really interested him. Ever since I can remember he was grubstaking prospectors. I think it was, with him, as it is with some men about religion; it was a deep abiding faith. I know that he put every dollar that he made into the ground. It kept us poor for all those years. But in spite of it he managed to send me away to California for school. That was after my mother died; it was her wish and he had promised her."

"Well," Lawton said, "his faith was justified. He proved it, all right."

"That," she told him, "was nearly a year ago. It was a pair of Idaho prospectors who made the strike. My father had told them of these hills and how he believed there was free milling ore here if only someone traced it down. So they took his advice and, when they found the first stringer of high grade, they let him know. But he was delayed for three months. By the time he came out to the spot they'd put four more veins in place, and they'd sold out to other people. My father bought it from these new owners on an option for two hundred thousand dollars."

Lawton whistled, "That's a high figure."

"They'd been offered more. But they had faith in my father."

"I'm glad to hear that it turned out all right," Lawton noticed that she did not seem to be paying any heed to him; she was gazing off into the darkness again, and the frown which he had caught before, was back.

"Yes," she answered after some moments. "It turned out all right. But of course we're not out of the woods yet. I suppose it's always the same way; one's never through with trouble. I drove him over to Golconda today; he's had to go away on business. That's how I hap-

pened to be coming through tonight when the cloudburst caught me."

"It must have come with a rush," Lawton said; but she shook her head.

"The water wasn't very deep down there in the gulch when I got stuck. It was the mud that mired the wheels. Later on I heard the flood coming but I stayed with the car, trying to get it out. I don't know what would have happened if you hadn't shown up just when you did. You seem to have a faculty for appearing when you're needed."

"I hope I manage to keep it, then." Lawton felt himself flushing. It was not so much what she said; in fact she had spoken very few words in the way of expressing her gratitude; it was the manner of her saying them. There was a straight-eyed sincerity about her that made him feel the reality of her thanks. He glanced about him; the wood was growing scarce within the shed. "I'm going after some rails," he announced. "There's an ax in the back of the car. Mind getting it for me?" He called the last words over his shoulder as he was hurrying away into the darkness, and he saw her starting on her errand.

WHEN he returned with a great load of long cedar rails, she was standing by the fire. She was holding the ax in her hand, and there was a look in her face that checked him, a strange white tightness which he could not understand. She did not speak; and he threw down the wood; he took the ax from her and set to work breaking the rails to shorter lengths. And all the while she maintained her silence. He looked at her more closely.

"You're shivering," he cried. "I'm going to bring a blanket. I should have thought of that before." He heard her give a little gasp as he started for the car.

His bedding-roll was lying on the floor between the front and rear seats.

He threw the door open, and seized the bundle to drag it forth. He was so intent upon the errand that he did not notice the thing in the back seat. The firelight had thrown a dense shadow over the corner where it was slumped down in an ugly heap, and he might not have seen it in his haste, if it had not been for the three-gallon canteen of water which lay between the blankets and the open door. He picked this up and placed it on the seat—and then his eyes fell on the dead man.

The Fact Unknown

By GORDON KEYNE

Illustrated by L. F. Grant

ALWAYS," said old Manning, speaking without a sound, "always there is a fact unknown. This is true of every man doomed to die. It may be some fact within himself, or outside of himself. Often, indeed, it may prove to be a friend unknown. A fact, a friend—these things are hard to define. Friends and facts are two different things, you say? I'm not so sure."

Cotterel stared moodily, glumly, at his cell-mate. The prison was silent. A guard paced by their cell door and glanced in at the two men sitting there, and went his way. Even in moments such as this, when no talk was allowed, these two men could talk freely, with no covert mutterings.

Old Manning had a touch of the mystic about him, thought Cotterel as he stared. Too much so at times; he was hard to understand. An old man, fragile, a delicate artist—a forger, in fact.

Cotterel was in for life, for a crime he had never committed. To him these months of prison had been undiluted agony; he was young, and life meant much to him. He was given to moods of rebellion, black despairing moods. Only old Manning, at such times, had held him from frenzied folly. The two were friends, and Manning had come to feel a real and deep affection for the younger man. Cotterel knew it, and valued it beyond words. It was the one thing left him in the world.

"A fact unknown? A friend? What are you driving at, anyway?" he demanded.

Manning regarded the younger man steadily, with a worried air. Then his fingers, the slender fingers of an artist, an engraver, a forger of bank-notes, made reply. Manning had this peculiarity: he was dumb. Cotterel, in these months of close association, had readily picked up the sign language, and could use it fluently, although as a rule he

spoke naturally, for Manning's ears were good.

"What's on your mind?" Manning spelled out the words, an expression of concern in his face. "I know you're innocent; you were sent here wrongly—"

"That's just it!" burst forth Cotterel, if such a term could be applied to his agonized finger-play. "I've been put in hell for life, and who gives a damn?"

"Wait," intervened the older man cynically. "Life' doesn't mean *life*, really; perhaps twenty years—"

Manning accomplished his sly intent. Cotterel, despite his situation, rallied in a heated argument.

"The point is," he concluded, "that twenty years might as well be all of life. No one gives a hang. I've nobody, except the woman I love. She has no money, no influence. What will have become of her, after twenty years? What will become of me, old, broken, wrecked? And all because of something I did not do."

"I know," Manning returned. "Your trial was a miscarriage of justice. Yet, as I said, there's always a fact unknown. It should be the mental alleviation, the one last hope, of every man in your fix. No matter what the fact is—whether sympathy in the breast of one juror, of one faithful friend; no matter if the man himself cannot believe it possible, can see no shred of hope at all."

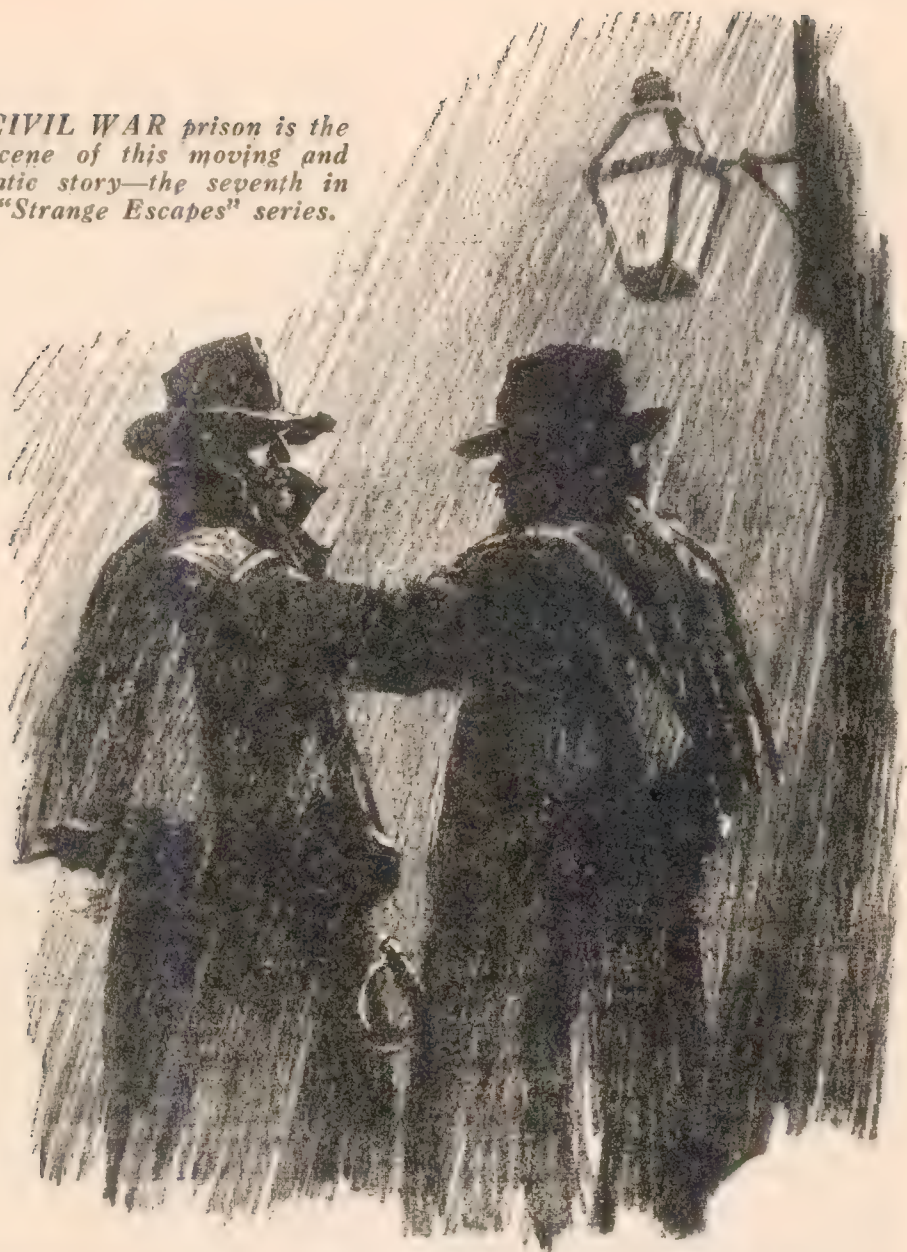
"Hope!" Cotterel's face was drawn and bitter. "There's no such thing—for me, anyhow."

THAT'S what Bannister thought," said Manning on nimble fingers. "He was more correct than you in the premise, for he was up against the only form of abstract justice that we have in America: military law."

"Who the devil was Bannister?"

"A Virginian. A tall, dark, grave young man; he had everything in life to live for—money and love and rank and ambition. In one moment, all this was

A CIVIL WAR prison is the scene of this moving and dramatic story—the seventh in this “Strange Escapes” series.



“Safe enough to talk now. . . . Donald, old man, don’t you know me?”

stripped from him, and he stood face to face with inexorable death—condemned, although innocent, to the ignominy of the noose. He had no particle of hope from any quarter.”

Again the older man had achieved his shrewd purpose, Cotterel was frowning at him, intently, with mind turned to a man in worse case than himself; the congested lobe of his brain, inflamed by thought and worry in his own behalf, was relieved as other lobes took up the labor and bent themselves to work on the case of Bannister.

“Is this some of your antique history, like the story of the dog Azo?”* he demanded with a trace of scorn in his face.

“Not so antique!” And Manning smiled gently. “It happened in what was then known as Western Virginia, when the Army of the Potomac faced Lee across the Rapidan, back in 1863, Bannister was a captain of cavalry in Stonewall Jackson’s corps.”

“Oh! Civil War stuff!” muttered Cotterel under his breath.

Manning blazed up. “The most truly American stuff you’ll ever hear! Stuff instinct with every American virtue and fault! It is a civil war that brings out, through hatred and the most ruthless en-

*See “Four Out of Bondage,” in Blue Book for May, 1938.



In stark incredulity, he stared.

mity, the finest qualities of any race. For hatred, like an alloy, dies into a firmly welding content of the finest steel. Bannister, like so many others, was one of a divided family—”

Manning was silent, thoughtful, in repose, for a long moment; then his deft, agile fingers began to move once more.

BANNISTER had a younger brother, whom he had not seen in four years. The boy had worshiped him, in the early days; then had been appointed to West Point; and when the war broke, had gone slap into the Union Army. Where he was, what had become of him, Bannister had not the least idea.

And now look at Bannister in his cell, a plastered cell in a stout little jail, well back of the Union lines. A brick and iron jail, solidly built, with escape impossible; all about it, in the jail yard, were stationed the men of the quartermaster's corps; the wall beyond was manned by sentries, the town streets beyond were filled with Union troops. Only the worst criminals were confined here—and men sentenced to death, like Bannister.

He had been caught back of the lines in Federal uniform; no two ways about

that. The woman he loved, who lived in Fredericksburg, lay seriously ill; Bannister had stolen through the lines to see her. And he had been caught. He had gambled all, and had lost.

HATRED ran high in those days. Yanks and Johnnies shared a bitter and abiding hatred. Spies were everywhere; when caught, they were dealt with by the rules of war. And Bannister, caught and recognized and haled before military law, was sentenced to be hanged.

Now, in his cell, he mentally reviewed his hopeless case. The advocate given him, an officer of rank, had believed his plain story, had accepted his word of honor that he was no spy; no one else had believed or accepted it. An appeal had been made to General Hooker. Until the answer came, he could not be certain when the execution would take place; but the delay held no hope whatever. Here was one of those terrible cases where all the open evidence was damning, where a man might desperately lie to save his neck—where even a lie would not be dishonor, since it would be in the service of a cause. Bannister knew this only too well.

His inner agony was frightful, but he gave no token of it except the drawn look in his harshly chiseled features. He had an old razor, and managed to shave daily—a rather rare thing, since most men were of necessity bearded in those days. As he sat, the distant mutter of artillery shook the air, hour after hour. . . .

To die by the noose! To die, quickly and shamefully, when Hooker's reply arrived! He could think of nothing else. Escape? It was impossible. He was well watched. His cell was searched each morning, when he was led out with the others under heavy guard of shotted guns, for daily exercise.

He sat there, sunk in hopeless despair, waiting. This was the horrible part of it: nothing to do but wait. Any occupation might have helped him mentally, but he had none. He had begged for even manual work, and it was curtly denied by his guards. The Commandant would not permit it. The Commandant—the accursed Commandant! He ruled that little jail with an iron rule. Bannister had twice seen him at a distance, a bearded, erect man in his blue officer's uniform. The Commandant would hang him in a few days more. That, he thought bitterly, would finish him with this blasted Commandant!

He was in shirt and Union blue trousers, just as he had been captured. With a weary sigh, he turned to the supper that had been put inside his barred and massive door. Beans, potatoes, a slab of sow-belly, a tin cup of coffee, a slab of still warm corn-bread, a wooden spoon—a fine and plentiful meal, by wartime standards. He picked up the slab of corn-bread, and it fell apart in his hand.

Blankly, in sheer stark incredulity, he stared. A thin, tiny file of steel, a scrap of paper, folded.

The blood rushed through his brain, in sudden comprehension. He swiftly slid the tiny file into his boot-top and opened the scrap of paper. A few words were printed on it in pencil—printed, to avoid betrayal of handwriting if intercepted.

DON'T SHAVE. WAITING MIDNIGHT
TOMORROW YOUR WINDOW.

Bannister wet his lips. A rattle of bolts at his door. He started, and shot the scrap of paper into his mouth, just as the door opened and a guard looked in.

"Tray aint ready, Cap'n?"

"Haven't had the heart to eat," said Bannister, feigning dejection to conceal his hammering pulses and inward excitement. "I'll get at it right now."

With a grumble, the guard slammed and bolted the massive door.

Bannister attacked his meal, avidly and wolfishly. The words of that note, with all they implied, burned into his consciousness. Some friend unknown, some Southern sympathizer, was here and at work. Perhaps one of the cooks—yes, that must be it!

Outside his window, tomorrow midnight? Perhaps, after all, one of the teamsters from the quartermaster's wagons parked in the jail yard. That would be more like it. Waiting, with clothes for him, with help!

Therefore, by tomorrow midnight, he must file his way through those window bars. He had the night, luckily, all tomorrow, tomorrow evening. To file even soft iron is slow work and laborious.

So his mind rioted, while he ate, and darkness deepened. He carefully adjusted the wooden spoon under his heel, and broke it. When the guard came in, bringing a light, and lighted the candle allotted the prisoner, Bannister pointed to the broken pieces on the floor. He picked up the bowl of the spoon and tossed it on the tray.

"Sorry," he said carelessly. "I dropped the spoon in the dark and stepped on it."

"You'll eat with your fingers tomorrow, I reckon," growled the guard, who was a savage soul. "That is, if you aint hung tomorrow."

Taking the tray, the man departed. Bannister waited, tensed, breathless, as the bolts shot home in the door. Then he relaxed in sharp, untold relief. Stooping, his trembling fingers picked up the shaft of the spoon; no attention had been paid to it, luckily.

He sat down and fell to work, glancing now and again at the window. It was of fair size, perhaps eight feet above the ground. Three bars traversed it in each direction—bars of flat strap iron, twisted, set solidly into the bricks. If he cut three at the side and two at the bottom, he might be able to bend out the whole thing and squirm through the opening. His brain flew back to stories he had heard—dirt and bread-crumbs filling the filed cuts, so they could not be observed.

Under flying fingers, he finished his preliminary job. To use that little file, so rapidly, so continuously, would be tremendously difficult; he had appreciated this almost from the first. But with a handle on it, the task would be lightened. Hence the shaft of the wooden spoon. He unraveled threads from his shirt, from his stout blue woolen trousers, which were ripped in places.

Threads, not strips. His agile brain was sharply aware that many tiny threads make a more durable and stouter binding than larger strips. Around and around, endlessly, he wrapped and tied. The file was bound to the wooden handle, a couple of inches protruding, and that was plenty just now. He could change it later if necessary.

So he fell at last to the actual work on the bars, after pinching out his candle.

HIS one fear of possible discovery came from outside his window. Men were all over the jail yard, squatted around camp-fires, telling yarns, drinking, singing songs; but if any approached closely, they would hear the rasping file.

There was little danger from the guard, who looked in occasionally; when this happened, the first noise of the bolts rasping back sent Bannister flopping on his couch, apparently sound asleep.

Hour passed into hours. Cramped at the window, he worked steadily. His first fervor died out after a time; he was appalled to realize the horribly slow progress he made. If he had possessed

a week in which to work, all would have been lovely. The stories about prisoners who had worked months and years with makeshift implements, flocked into his mind with ghastly, mocking contrast. He had twenty-four hours—and perhaps would not have that, if the answer came from Hooker. That his appeal would be denied, was practically certain.

IT was long after midnight change of guard when one bar was through. The dawn was graying when the second yielded. Two only. Haggard, weary, his fingers raw, his hand-muscles so strained and aching that they were almost useless, he contemplated the three remaining bars with sinking heart. Before the next midnight they must be cut—and with daylight, he would not dare run the risk of being seen at the window, working.

Disheartened, a thousandfold more despairing than before, he managed to fill the cuts with dirt gathered from the floor. His file hidden in his boot, he dropped on his cot and slumbered like a man dead.

Later in the morning, the guard stirred him roughly awake, for inspection. This was casual enough. Bannister polished off his breakfast, was marched around and around the yard for exercise, was locked up again. The exercise period ended early—a drizzle of rain was falling.

The drizzle became a deluge, with thunder booming overhead and drowning out the guns that muttered along the Wilderness front.

At this, a feverish hope leaped in the prisoner's heart. That storm of rain kept all loungers away in the yard; he dared to work again, with strips of cloth from his shirt wound about his raw fingers. And in the light of day, he found the work easier; besides, he had learned the knack of it.

In between the squalls of rain, he desisted, but taking no chances; when men muffled in greatcoats passed his window, he drew away hastily. As the early daylight waned, he shook the bar and shook it again, put his grip to it—and it broke.

Two bars remained to cut.

Evening drew down. The worst of the rain was over; it had settled now into an intermittent drizzle. A wet disagreeable night, and nothing could have suited Bannister's purpose better. His supper over, he was hard at work when the rasping bolts warned him. He dropped everything, and was lying on his cot when an officer entered with a lantern and a

guard. He was roused, a black stubble of unshaven beard blurring his features.

"I have a letter here to read you—"

It burned into him as he stood at attention—burned with scathing phrases. General Joe Hooker had no use for spies, and said so. . . . Immediate execution—to be hanged at daybreak. He would be roused an hour beforehand. A chaplain would be sent him.

He was alone again in darkness, alone with destiny. The appeal denied! Well, to the devil with it, and Joe Hooker to boot!

A shaky laugh was in his brain and on his lips, as he crept back to the window and took up his file anew. To be hanged at daybreak? Well, his unknown friend had saved him from that, at least. He might stop a bullet, but he would never be hanged now!

As his fingers pressed steel to iron, he fell to reflecting anew upon the identity of that unknown friend outside. Some teamster, hardly a doubt of that, pressed into service and hating the Federals secretly. Perhaps, of course, one of the cooks, but more likely a teamster from among the wagons here at hand.

Once in the yard here, what about the wall and the sentries? Well, time enough to think about that, and the town streets beyond, with Yanks everywhere. If his unknown friend could provide garments for him, some way of passing the wall or the sentries might also be provided.

"Wait and see!" he told himself, as the iron and the file shredded his finger-ends. "With an unknown friend, anything is possible!"

He worked frantically, resolutely.

TEN o'clock, by the sentries' calls. The iron twist yielded under his bleeding hands; one remained. He attacked it without pause. Two hours.

Fatigue, lack of sleep, weary hands—nothing mattered now. He was to hang with the dawn, if he remained here, and he revolted against that dog's death, recoiled with all his Virginian heart and soul. Better by far to stop the hot lead of sentries in some wild and hopeless dash for liberty! Once out of here, he was assured of that more kindly fate, at least. . . .

Rasp and rasp; pause, with fingers aching. Wet the iron. Rasp and rasp again. Change position, pause, work the fatigued, worn fingers, and then to rasping again with teeth set hard and iron will spurring the failing muscles.

"I have a letter here to read you."
General Hooker had no use for spies,
and said so. . . . Immediate execution
—to be hanged at daybreak.



Eleven o'clock. Outside in the yard, no fires or lights; the wagons empty, save for teamsters asleep in them. The rain slackening, a breath of wet sweet wind from the countryside, then gathering rain once more. A perfect night, perfect!

He worked on and on. He could feel the little wedge of nothingness as the file bit deeper and deeper. In a frenzy, he felt the handle coming loose, tore it free, and put the new and sharper unused edges of the file to work; he toiled in a fury of hurried heart and gritting teeth and bleeding fingers.

Midnight; the guard was being relieved.

Still the iron held, but only by a shred. Gasping, he gripped it, bent his weight against it—*crack!* The bar gave.

Finished! For a moment he hung there, sobbing in breath after breath of relief. Then, standing on his cot, he braced himself and leaned his weight again. As he had calculated, the remaining bars bent well enough to serve his objective.

Farther and farther out he bent them; then desisted, panting. The way was open. He was as good as free this mo-

ment. Yet midnight had come, and passed, with no sign from his unknown friend. A squad of men went tramping past in the mud and cinders of the yard. As their slogging tread died out, a voice spoke softly.

"Bannister?"

"All set. Shall I come out?"

"Quickly."

A thick, gruff voice, quite strange to him. Oddly enough, at this instant Bannister hesitated, held back mentally. A frightful conjecture broke upon him; had this escape been arranged so that he might be shot down? He had heard of some such thing being worked. Then he laughed, and swung himself at the window. What matter? Better a bullet than the hangman's noose!

He forced himself out, squeezing past the cut bars that scraped his body. He let himself go any way at all, careless of how he landed, and came down with a flop that knocked the wind out of him.

IN the darkness, a dim black figure loomed over him, helped him up.

"Hurt? No? Here!"

The gruff words were curt. Bannister gasped breath into his jolted lungs as garments were shoved at him. For the moment, the rain had ceased. The wet air was sodden, dense with humidity.

Garments—a dark shirt, a coat, a muffling army overcoat. As he struggled into them, Bannister eyed the vaguely black figure beside him. To see any details of the man was quite impossible.

"Who are you, anyhow?" he demanded.

"No talk," came the response. "Here."

Bannister took the black slouch hat thrust at him, and pulled it over his head. The coat was around him, the collar up about his face.

"Ready? Come along. Keep close," came the order, and the other man started away, straight for the entrance gate. Bannister came up to him, touched him on the arm and halted him, with a low word.

"Tell me—"

"Shut up!" The response was savage and curt. "No talk."

The voice of a man at high tension, keyed up to taut nerves; Bannister, realizing his own folly in trying to learn who this companion was, muttered an apology and fell a step behind.

They came to the gate, where a lantern swung. Bannister found himself detained by a touch, as the guard was

turned out. His companion advanced a step or two and spoke with the corporal in charge of the squad, who saluted briskly. Ah! An officer, then!

He could not see the man's face at all; a sword-scabbard flashed beneath the greatcoat. He could not hear the low, muttered words. The corporal saluted again, and ordered the gate swung open.

"Everything quiet, sir," he said. "You're going down the street? There's a picket blocking it, fifty feet outside; they'll know you, of course."

Oh! Bannister heard these words clearly enough. No teamster, no cook, but an officer, and some well-known officer, at that. The mystery of it enveloped him, staggered him. An officer, a Union officer, arranging his escape? It was incredible.

Something more incredible still lay ahead of him, as he followed the other outside. His companion caught his arm.

"Silence, on your life! Keep close."

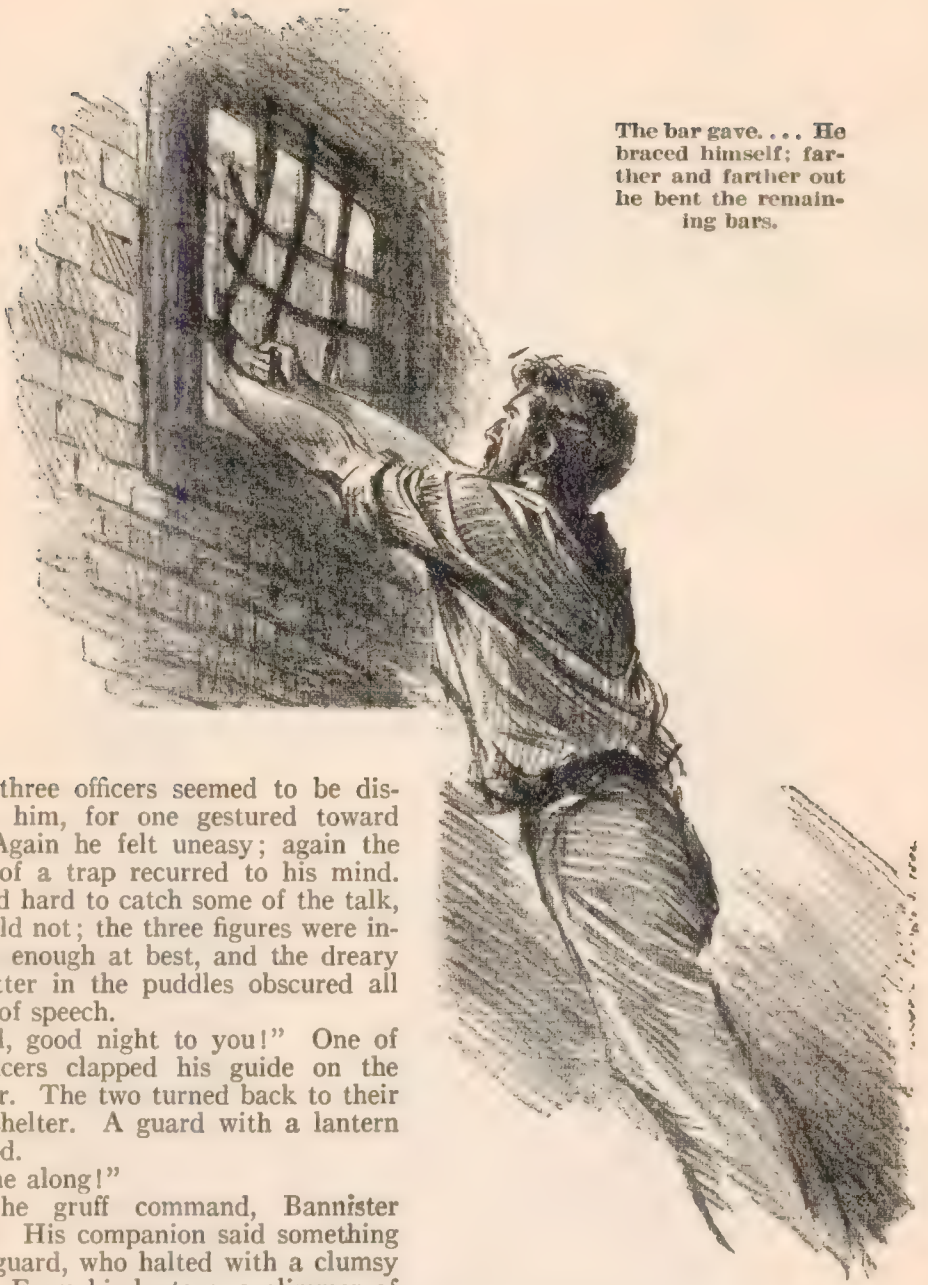
With this, the Federal officer swung straight ahead. A fire glowed dimly, protected from the rain and wind. Lanterns bobbed. Men were moving about. Obviously, the street here was blocked by this picket. Bannister, with sharp realization, perceived that he would never have been able to pass, alone.

His companion, who had escorted him out of the prison yard, was now, obviously, seeing him safe through this final danger. Or was there a trap in it? Utterly illogical as the thought was, Bannister none the less felt it pluck at him.

THE rain was beginning to drizzle afresh. A sentry halted the two. Bannister tried to obey the order and keep close to his companion; but the latter, after a glance at two officers coming to interrogate him, uttered a word.

"Wait."

With this word, he stepped forward to meet the two officers. There was a quick exchange of greetings, a hand-grip, and the three moved off to one side, talking together. Evidently, once more, this companion of his was well known, Bannister reflected. He waited, immobile, drawing the coat collar closer about his face. The guard ignored him; but his glances flitted about, taking in every detail in case something went wrong and he had to leg it down the street. A dark, unlit street, deserted at this hour of the night, all lights extinguished. A man could hide well enough, he thought, somewhere among the houses of the town.



The bar gave. . . . He
braced himself; farther
and farther out
he bent the remain-
ing bars.

The three officers seemed to be discussing him, for one gestured toward him. Again he felt uneasy; again the notion of a trap recurred to his mind. He tried hard to catch some of the talk, but could not; the three figures were indistinct enough at best, and the dreary rain-patter in the puddles obscured all sounds of speech.

"Well, good night to you!" One of the officers clapped his guide on the shoulder. The two turned back to their warm shelter. A guard with a lantern appeared.

"Come along!"

At the gruff command, Bannister obeyed. His companion said something to the guard, who halted with a clumsy salute. From his lantern, a glimmer of light lit the face of Bannister's companion, lit it from the side.

"You don't want me to light you through the mud?" said the guard. "Very good, sir. A good night to you. We'll be watching for your return, Commandant."

Bannister, already stepping forward, was checked as by a hand thrust at his chest.

Commandant! That word, that flash of the guard's lantern on the bearded profile of his companion, struck Bannister absolutely dumb. The prison Commandant himself! Hot suspicion flamed through his brain. What devil's trickery was this—perhaps to get him

swiftly shot? As he hesitated and drew back, the other spoke gruffly.

"Come along, come along!"

In the rain and mud and darkness, Bannister swung into step again. Then his companion halted, swung around, gripped him by the shoulders.

"Safe enough to talk now. . . . Donald, old man, don't you know me?"

Bannister quivered. The low, laughing voice—

"Why, Jack, boy!" he gasped. "It can't be you—it's impossible!"

The other laughed; they clung together for a moment, until Bannister drew back. This bearded officer, the boy so long lost to sight, his own brother!

"But Jack, what the devil does it all mean?" he demanded, bewildered. "If you're the commandant, why haven't you come near me, sent me word?"

"Didn't dare do it, Donald," the other rejoined. "I couldn't raise your hopes; I had to keep our relationship quiet. Nobody suspected, in spite of the names being alike. All hands have been too cursed busy to think. I knew it was you, of course. I went over the records of your case. You had given your word

A dim figure loomed over him. "Hurt? No? Here!" The gruff words were curt.



of honor that you weren't spying—that was good enough for me, Don. Nobody else believed it, but I believed it."

"Thanks, old fellow," said Bannister quietly. "Lord, but it's good to see you again, to find you alive and well! So you contrived this escape?"

The other grunted. "More than that. There was no use appealing to Hooker; it was only too certain what his answer would be. I took a chance and telegraphed direct to Lincoln—to Old Abe.

I staked my honor on yours, my faith on yours; asked him for a pardon, on condition you'd not bear arms against us further—the honor of a Virginia gentleman, Don."

Bannister caught his breath.

"Good Lord, Jack! What did he say?"

"Nothing," rejoined the other bitterly. "No reply. Yesterday afternoon, I received a communication from Hooker, denying your appeal and ordering you executed at once. Well—I tell you, for

a while I was like a crazy man!" As he spoke, agitation filled his voice. "Then I thought of the way—the escape. I lost Hooker's letter and took a chance on getting hell for it, later. I got the file and message to you. I didn't dare lose the letter longer than a day, you see. I found it again this afternoon. You know the rest—to be hanged at daylight. Meantime, all was well, I trusted, with your escape. So that's the story. Now, I want your promise not to bear arms against us further. It'll salve my conscience for what I've done, Don; brother or no brother, by God, it's not been easy!"

"You have my word," said Bannister quietly. Their hands gripped.

"Thanks, Don," came the reply. "Now, we'll go down to the next street. I have a horse ready and waiting. The password is *Gideon*. I've a pass written out for you, besides."

"And no answer from Lincoln, eh?"

"None. Of course, that was a desperate chance—Good Lord! Stand quiet!"

Bobbing lanterns, clicking, mud-throwing hoofs, several riders coming hastily upon them, with no chance for evasion. They drew against a house-wall, the Commandant shielding Bannister's figure. The dancing rays of a lantern touched them, shouts rang out. One of the riders dismounted with a salute.

"Here y'are, Commandant!" he exclaimed. "I seen it was danged important, so I come on the run to find you. Just come in over the wire—wrote it down myself."

The Union officer took the slip of paper. A lantern was held close as he read it.

"Thank God!" he said in a low voice. "Donald—the answer from Washington! Lincoln accepts my plea, orders you released—"

ALL the night scene faded and was gone in a tramp of feet. Cotterel was in the prison cell again, guards at the door, a rough voice snapping out an order: "Thirty-seven-fifteen!" That was old Manning's prison number. "Thirty-seven-fifteen! You're wanted at the Warden's office. Step out!"

Cotterel stared up blankly. Manning rose, gestured assent, and in passing, touched his cheek with those slender, deft fingers: A caress, a farewell, an assurance what was it? Just a friendly touch, perhaps.

Alone, Cotterel sat staring. Something wrong? Such a summons to the Warden's office meant something tremendous, something weighty, in the air. He sat in growing suspense and anxiety; yet despite his tension, his mind dwelt upon the story that Manning had just told him.

Now he perceived what Manning must have meant by his earlier mention of a "fact unknown." Bannister had never dreamed, of course, that the prison Commandant was his own brother, planning for him, hoping for him, pleading and working for his life. The thing must have broken upon his spirit like a flash of lightning across the sky.

"But that's just it—there was a different case," he muttered, falling into instant and more profound despair. "Nothing like that for me. I've no family, nobody. The woman I love is helpless. These days, we can't expect such miracles as a pardon from the President." A hollow laugh escaped him. "The President! Fat chance, these days. What the devil did Manning mean by telling me all that yarn, anyhow? I know better—"

HE looked up, came to his feet. Manning was being ushered into the cell again. The older man was joyous, beaming. His flashing fingers broke into instant swift speech.

"Cotterel! Remember what I said—about the fact unknown? It was true. The Warden said I might tell you myself. I went to him awhile back; I told him everything about your case. He just got a letter about it. That's why he sent for me—"

"The Warden?" blurted Cotterel. "My case? What the hell is it to him?"

"Well, it's a lot to me." And Manning laughed silently. "I can do nothing for myself, but I have friends outside. The Warden let me appeal to them. They went to the judges, to the Governor. Old man, it's happened! You're to have a new trial; your case is to be re-opened—and you know what that'll mean! All this hell is ended for you, my boy."

Cotterel sank on his cot, as though beneath actual physical impact. He drew a deep breath; his face sank in his hands, and a sob shook him.

But old Manning, beside him, leaned forward and touched his cheek gently, caressingly, with the deft nimble fingers that would never forge again.

Another dramatic story in this memorable series will be a feature of our next issue.

The



Illustrated by
Frederic Anderson

NEVER before in all his life had Ol' Man Cap'n Didier Dauterive—in the *Héloise*—steamed toward a dance with murder in his heart, but he was doing it now. From time to time, as his anger flooded over him in swift surges, his hard old hands gripped the spokes of her steering-wheel as if they were the throats of men out of whom he was choking the breath of life. Battle-light gleamed at those moments in his washed-out old blue-gray eyes, as they peered through the gathering dusk out of the pilot-house window, and then it was that his wrath shook him almost as the engine of the little bayou steamboat shook her. And the progress of the sturdy old flap-paddle stern-wheeler along the twisting, winding channels of the Louisiana deep swamp and coastal marshes was marked by shiverings that seemed always on the verge of rattling the very hog-chains that held her ancient timbers together.

In the pilot-house the voices of the two young folks—Julie Dupuy and the stranger, the city fisherman Didier had picked up with the motor dead in his cruiser—mingled pleasantly in the swift talk of girl and youth who have just discovered

each other, and are eager to explore the new country chance and accident has just opened up before their eyes.

But if this young Bob Lomax and Julie Dupuy were light-hearted, Ol' Man Cap'n had a long way to travel to reach that happy goal. His anger had set like concrete, now. His thoughts hurt from the bruises they had got, dashing against it. He knew that nothing would ease what hurt him until he stood with his worn old six-shooter in his hand, face to face with Jean Crepelle. Soon as this dance was over at Bayou Placide shrimp platform, by the Lord, he told himself, he'd run down Crepelle no matter where he might be, and get this business over. Octave Légros, master of Placide Platform, would know where Crepelle had been seen last, if he wasn't at his usual Chéramie Platform headquarters. This was something to be settled down here in the marshes or in the deep swamp.

Out of the last reach of Bayou Sauvage the *Héloise* was trudging now into Bay St. Anthony. The bay's wide waters stretched ahead in the thickening dusk. Far to the west, where the endless coastal marsh came down to the sea, lights twinkled and gleamed low against the darkening horizon. The sight bred pleasanter thoughts in Ol' Man Cap'n's mind.

Steamboat Man

The author of "Two Yards of Soldier" and "A Warrior Goes Home" here gives us a fine novelette of the bayou country.

By MEIGS FROST

"Hi, Julie," he called. "Yondeh's Placide Platform. Reckon they're tunin' up fo' Big Octave's dance right now."

"Lend me your glasses a minute, please," said Julie Dupuy. She stepped forward, slim, rounded and lithe, her crisp dark windblown hair tumbled with the sea-breeze, her brown eyes as alight as if she hadn't been scared to death less than twenty-four hours ago, and drew the old binoculars from their box near the steering-wheel.

"Come outside, Bob," she called. "We can see better there, and not crowd around Ol' Man Cap'n while he's steering. If you never saw a shrimp platform before, you're in for something."

They passed through the pilot-house door. So she was calling him "Bob" already, thought Didier. And he heard young Lomax's voice start a sentence with, "Say, Julie—" Fast workers, these young folks. . . . Fine thing, though, for little Julie to have a friend her own age. Must have got mighty lonesome for her sometimes, over on *Chenièrre Chighizola*, even if she loved the spot. Might not be so happy with that old aunt of hers in New Orleans, either. But she'd be safe, and that was something.

Ol' Man Cap'n turned the wheel a trifle. The *Héloise* swung slightly starboard. Now she held steady across Bay St. Anthony for Placide Platform.

"Damnedest trip this ol' rattletrap ever took in all my natch'l life," swore Didier Dauterive.

Then as another thought struck him, Ol' Man Cap'n groaned to himself.

"Good Gawd! Wondeh if'n folks'll think I done shot Hardshell Crepelle to get a competitor out o' my business!"

IT had been the damnedest trip, for Didier Dauterive. It had started in wrath, and the wrath at its beginning had been love compared to the hard anger at the news little Julie Dupuy had told him. And anger did not usually

steam the bayous with Ol' Man Cap'n. His was a kindly heart at the start, and it had only mellowed more in the years that, as owner and master of this ancient steamboat *Héloise*, he had trudged up and down the flowing roads of the bayous, constituting the only link of many of those remote Louisiana swamp and coastal settlements with the world outside.

THEY were his people, as he saw it. Shrimpers and fishermen and oystermen, trappers of muskrat and mink and otter, the men who gathered the long silvery gray-green Spanish moss that draped the trees of that region until they looked like squat and bearded giants, and sold their harvest to mattress-manufacturers "up in front" around New Orleans. Men who harvested the soft-shell crabs from the wide, shallow lakes and bayous for the city epicures; men who caught the hardshell crabs for the canning factories. Men who cut railroad ties in the deep wet swamps. Every last one of them knew Ol' Man Cap'n as his friend.

More years than anybody remembered he had brought down into their wide and watery domain the supplies that stocked the shelves of the little stores on bayou bank or on *chenière*, those strange clay upcrops in the endless miles of level marsh, always topped by the cluster of wind-twisted live oaks, moss-bearded, that gave them their name. He swerved in to their rickety little boat-landings as their wives and daughters hailed him, and he "ran errands" for them "up front," even to the matching of samples of dress-goods. He carried their sick, at need, up to the New Orleans hospitals.

He was a familiar figure at the great shrimp platforms that spraddled the oozy shores of the coastal marshes like sprawled-out thousand-legs, villages set on piling above the surge of the storm-driven waves, with their cabins and stores set on their acres of plank flooring. Here the lugger fleets brought the tons

of fresh-caught shrimp their seining crews had hauled from the shallow water waters along the shores of the Gulf of Mexico (for this was before the days of deep-water trawling), and here they were boiled in gigantic cast-iron caldrons over flaming cordwood fires. Here they were spread to dry in the torrid suns that beat daily on the platforms, the shrimp meats, boiled in salt water, becoming rubbery and resilient, and the shrimp's armorlike shell becoming brittle as thin glass. Here the dried shrimp were raked into huge circles, and to the music of accordion and guitar, the rough men of the platform crews in heavy brogans "danced" the shrimp with a shuffling, scuffling step as the barefooted peasant girls of France once trod the wine from the grapes of the vintage. Then, screened free of the shell-fragments by the shovelful, cast against slanting screens as builders screen gravel, the pink sundried meats were packed in barrels for shipment to the hungry millions of the Orient. And it was the *Héloise*, with Ol' Man Cap'n at the wheel, that trundled those barreled cargoes up front to New Orleans, where the ships bound for China and Japan waited at the wharves, just as he trundled down the bayous their endless loads of supplies.

They were a wild, free, hardy, rough and rollicking lot, those men of the lugger fleets and the platform crews. It took men of strength and rough wisdom to handle them. And the boss of a shrimp platform often was lord of the high justice, the middle and the low. He had to be, in this watery wilderness.

SOME of those overlords of the platforms were fine men. Such a one was Big Octave Légros, master of Placide Platform. There was more than rough justice in his rule over men who carried weapons habitually, whose knives were as much part of their costume as their trousers. There was understanding about Big Octave, who tipped the scales close to three hundred pounds; one of those tall fat men who can move with catlike speed when they have to.

Every "settle-up day," as the platform pay-days were known, Big Octave gave a dance at Placide. The wide platform area made a splendid big dancing-floor when waxed with shaven tallow candles. They had their own amateur orchestra at Placide; accordion, guitar, banjo, harmonica, the ringing steel triangles the folks of the coast call "*les fers*"—and

even old feet itched when they played. They had the best cook on the coast at Placide, and when in the scoured huge shrimp-boiling caldron he made the gumbo for the pay-day dance, it was something for epicures to taste. And always, gift of Big Octave himself, there were half a dozen barrels of strong red wine standing about the dancing floor, their heads knocked in, a ring of tin dippers hanging about the barrel-edge by hooked handles, and everybody helped himself. Not to mention huge pots of steaming black coffee, and great loaves of crusty French bread.

Small wonder, then, that men and women, youths and girls, came to Big Octave's pay-day party at Placide Platform, all the way from the Côte Blanche and Cypremort on the west, to the Chan-deleurs on the east. They came in workboats, in luggers, in pirogues and flat-bottomed square-ended johnboats, even. That dance had been known to last two days and three nights without a break.

AND on the *Héloise* this moment, coming across Bay St. Anthony toward Placide, were the six great barrels of strong red wine that were to give the party its greatest impetus. It was Ol' Man Cap'n's regular job to bring that wine. Also to drink some of it, dance at least one dance with any girl he chose, and kiss the prettiest girl he could find, publicly, amid cheers.

It was a fine thing that at Placide Platform there was a boss like Big Octave Légros.

But all the folks of bayou, swamp and coast, weren't like Ol' Man Cap'n and Big Octave. Over at Chéramie Platform, some miles across Bay St. Anthony, they had a boss like Jean Crepelle. Hardshell Crepelle!

Those folk of the Louisiana coast had a very clear picture in their minds when they christened Jean Crepelle "Hardshell." In those waters lived countless millions of the hardshell crabs men called merely "hardshells." They grew big as dinnerplates—clad in heavy armor that made them invulnerable in their world, save for the periods when they were growing, and went into hiding to burst their old shells for new. They were ferocious in their world as tigers in their native jungle. What they saw and wanted, they seized with rending claws and gulped with greedy mouths. In the end their ferocious greed was their own undoing, for they were caught in great shipments

for the canning factories, by the fierce tenacity with which they held onto the bait that fishermen offered, and so were hauled to the surface and scooped up in nets until men grew weary of the work.

Seize ferociously, hold tenaciously, rend and gulp greedily—that was Jean Crepelle's way.

Swart, stocky, with hugely broad shoulders and the chest of a gorilla, with a thick shock of black hair coarse as that in a horse's mane, and with opaque black eyes, he was a fast and willing rough-and-tumble fighter to whom no holds or blows were barred. And like any man who assumes authority of leadership and is ready to back it up with blow or weapon, he had followers who came to cluster around him.

Smuggling was the foundation on which he built. And though *smuggling* is an elastic word, Hardshell Crepelle stretched it until it cracked, even in the eyes of the Louisiana coast. Traditionally, there, for more than two centuries, smuggling has been no real crime. It is a game to them, fast, thrilling and profitable. Those mazes of twisting bayous that interlace the deep swamp and the coastal marshes, connecting with rivers that lead to safe mooring-places near many a city and town, these were the good Lord's gift to those who matched wits and speed against those who collect customs duties or enforce laws that say what a man shall have and what he shall not have, regardless of what he wants.

BUT smuggling and privateering had their limits; and Hardshell Crepelle, seemingly, had none. In the tales men told known friends in low voices, Hardshell Crepelle's name was linked to sudden and violent deaths, the news of which never appeared in the newspapers; to strange tales of the running of liquor, of narcotic drugs and of Chinese, from the obscure little Latin-American ports so conveniently at hand.

He was not the commander-in-chief of those furtive forces, men agreed. That man was some mysterious head of what men called "the Ring." Where he dwelt was guesswork, but his orders came to Louisiana by mysterious lieutenants whose identification was the other half of a torn bank-note that must match jagged edge and serial number with the half held by a man in Louisiana. And it was accepted on the coast as common knowledge that the second half always was with Hardshell Crepelle.



"I got four shotguns,"
contributed Ol' Man Cap'n.

How else, argued bayou men among themselves, could this quarrelsome bully of the bayous have obtained the money with which he bought Chéramie shrimp platform and assembled there a crew of hard-bitten men who, if not outcasts and outlaws, were perilously close to being both? But Chéramie Platform gave Hardshell Crepelle an address, an ostensible business, and a base. It gave him apparently legitimate reasons for his comings and goings up and down the bayous. If strange, small, fast craft without lights nosed in alongside its wharf at night, out of the Gulf of Mexico—well, it was nobody's business, anyway, except Hardshell's. If there were an unusually large number of Chinese in the platform crew or the crews of the luggers that brought shrimp there—well, nothing official had been done about it.

Yet the ancient tradition of the care-free lavishness of the smuggler meant nothing to Jean Crepelle. Indeed, there was a streak of penny-pinching meanness in the man that made him rejoice at any "smart trick" he could play on those who dealt with him. Big Octave of Placide held him in contempt, would hold no further dealings with him in any form. And men still told, guardedly, of the time he had tried to cheat Ol' Man Cap'n on the freight-charges of an emergency shipment he had begged Didier to haul for him on the *Héloise*.

Crepelle had offered only two-thirds payment, claiming damages in transit. When Ol' Man Cap'n asked for proof of the damages, Crepelle had turned to roaring threats of what happened to men

who wouldn't take his word. Suddenly he found himself facing the muzzle of a heavy old six-shooter from which the blue had been worn until the steel shone as nakedly as the steel in Didier Daute-rive's eyes.

Hardshell Crepelle paid in full, with the threat: "I'll break you wide open for this."

"Crack yo' whip, Crepelle," was the last word he had heard from Didier, as the old steamboat man backed from the little shack office on Chéramie Platform aboard the *Héloise*, eyes and pistol-muzzle still steady.

HARDSHELL CREPELLE had cracked his whip.

Ol' Man Cap'n had heard the sound for the first time while the *Héloise* was loading for the very trip on which now she was coming closer to Placide Platform with every turn of her sloshing old stern wheel. The little bayou steamboat had been moored at the Harvey Canal landing, just inside the locks of the Mississippi River west-bank levee across from New Orleans. Snakehips, Hawg-head and Sugarhoof, his three "Senegambian steamboatin' sons-of-guns," as he called those three loyal black boys who then composed his little crew, for the moment had laid aside their higher ratings as engineer-fireman, cook, and deck-hand. Just then they were roustabouts. Stripped to the waist, their black skins shining with sweat in the Louisiana sun, with rippling muscles they were rustling freight aboard over the slanting, sagging gangplank, with the swaying "coonjine" step that told the envious group of black boys and girls clustered on the bank watching them, their playtime friends, that here were three steamboatin' men, and they'd be out of this place soon, and all stay-at-homes be damned.

Ol' Man Cap'n's crew were proud of him and the *Héloise*. They would have shoved her through hell for him with a grin, if her old timbers had been celluloid and she had been loaded with gasoline. They were institutions in bayou-land, and they knew it. Only the night before, in Li'l Man Mudhook's Place behind the levee, after the hot cat and gin had got their play, and the crap-shooting was about to start, it was Snakehips who had pulled one of those lines that live and circulate where the darkies gather about plates of hot fried slabs of river catfish.

"Dunnp whetheh Class A steamboatin' boys lak us wants to do any crap-shootin'

wif any Class B niggehs lak yo'-all o' not," he said.

"Whaddyuh mean, Class B niggehs, yo' liveh-lipped bayou Bugalee?" The truck-driver who made the demand reached significantly into his pocket. So did Snakehips.

"Us Class A boys, we aint stuck in de mud in no one place," he said, never yielding an inch. "Heah t'day an' gone t'morra. Lands, unloads, raises us a li'l hell. Loads, hops aboa'd—*whooo-whooo* says de whistle, an' we's long gone. Y'all Class B niggehs, yuh *be* heah when we goes, an' yuh *be* heah when we comes back. Any argyment?"

There wasn't. Snakehips was a fast-moving boy in his own social circles. . . .

That story had got back to Ol' Man Cap'n already, and he was chuckling quietly at the memory of it, as he checked the cargo coming aboard, for he was his own "mud clerk." And in the down-coast shipment from the Drummond Wholesale Grocery Company, there were several items missing.

So presently he was riding back to the west-bank warehouse of that firm to see his old friend Andy Drummond and get that little detail straightened out before the *Héloise* shoved off.

IT was straightened in a few minutes, and he sat listening to bluff old Andy Drummond's friendly voice in the little warehouse office. Then his eyes partly closed and a keener look came into them at what he was hearing.

"Don't know whether you've heard of it or not, Didier," Andy Drummond was saying, "but it looks as if you had competition ahead, and no holds barred."

"No, Andy. Hadn't heard. Sho' would like to hear 'bout it, if'n yo' feel yo' can tell me."

"I can tell you," said Andy Drummond. "Young man in here to see me three days ago. Tried to sign me up for a new freight service he says is starting out of here down the coast, next month, soon as they buy a steamboat they're dickering for now. Faster and better than the *Héloise*, he said. I told him speed didn't mean so much down there, and my shipments always got there in good condition, so I didn't know just what 'better' meant."

Drummond lit a long black cheroot, and through its billowing smoke looked straight at Ol' Man Cap'n.

"He asked me if twenty-five-per-cent cut in the freight-rates meant anything

"Crepelle tells Julie he goes where he wants with whoever he wants; he reaches out fo' her—and Julie slaps his face."



these days, Didier," he said. "I told him that depended on several things. He said, well, how about a straight cut of freight-rates that slashed 'em square in half. Told him that depended on who was starting the service, and why. That was when he came right out of the bushes. Polite enough, but he asked me point-blank if, on top of all that slash in rates, it was worth anything to any man who did business down in that country to be friends with Hardshell Crepelle."

"Some folks might believe that's a kinda powerful argyment, Andy," admitted Ol' Man Cap'n. "Yo' close with him, Andy?"

"No. Told him I'd think it over and let him know. I've thought it over. You and me, we've been doing business together a long time, Didier. Know each other. Word's good. Stand hitched, both of us. Can't say as much for everybody. We'll keep on doing business for a while, Ol' Man Cap'n."

"Thanks, Andy. Goin' to do a li'l figgehin' myse'f, an' see can I shave down yo' freight-charges a li'l, Andy."

"Never mind about that. You know well as I do what Hardshell's charges would be, soon as he put you out of business. But you'd better watch some of your other shippers, Didier."

"Sho' will. Thanks fo' the tip, Andy."

Ol' Man Cap'n rode back to the *Héloise* on Andy Drummond's truck, with the missing items of the shipment. He was so buried in his thoughts that he couldn't have told afterward much about what he passed on the way. For it was dawning on him what a bitter and

crippling fight this could be, and that he wasn't as young as he used to be.

This fight might mean ruin to him, Ol' Man Cap'n began to realize. Worse than mere loss of money. For, if his voyages up and down the bayous in the *Héloise* were to end— Why, they had become life itself!

THEN, as the *Héloise* came into sight ahead, when the truck rounded into the road to the canal landing, suddenly something stiffened in Ol' Man Cap'n's spine. His jaw tightened. His shoulders squared.

"Hell with him!" he said out loud, unconsciously. "If'n he's stickin' out his neck beggin' fo' a fight, by God, he'll find he's got him a fight!"

"What's that, Ol' Man Cap'n, suh?" said the astonished truck-driver.

"Nothin', Sam," said Didier. "Just thinkin' out loud, that's all."

"Sho' sounded lak yo' was thinkin' up plenty trouble fo' somebody, suh!" the big black boy grinned.

"Hope so, Sam."

Snakehips, Hawghead and Sugarhoof had nearly finished their roustabout job as Ol' Man Cap'n walked aboard the

Héloise, shoulders still squared, chin still out-thrust.

"Come on, yo' hook-wo'm-ridden sons o' Satan!" he roared. "Shake them liveh-colored laigs! Quit actin' lak yo' wanted to marry an' settle down heah! Rustle that freight aboa'd befo' I give yo' jobs to a couple steamboat men!"

"Yas-suh, Cap'n! Comin' up right now!"

They came coonjining down the gang-plank, all three heavy-laden, all three agrin. They dumped the last load on the splintery deck-planks as Ol' Man Cap'n mounted to the pilot-house.

"Get that tin tea-kettle yo' calls an engine tu'nin' oveh, Snakehips!" he hol-lered. "Yo' Hawghead! Yo' Sugahhoof, stand by to cast off!"

"Yas-suh, Ol' Man Cap'n!"

His weather-darkened old hand reached up, grasped the whistle-cord, and blew the wheezy blast that always signaled departure. He gripped the steering-wheel. Shivering from blunt bow to blunter stern as the lone paddle-wheel began to revolve, the *Héloise* got under way once more. Dark water widened between guards and wharf. The little group of colored folk on the bank waved farewell to their departing playmates.

Steering his steamboat straight down the familiar old canal that slave labor

had dug long before the Civil War, Ol' Man Cap'n felt renewed confidence and courage surge over him. Maybe he had needed a fight like this one that loomed with Hardshell Crepelle. Maybe—

"Hell with yo', Hardshell," he said out loud. "Even a hardshell cracks when a man steps on it! If'n a dirty double-crossin' crook can beat out white folks, it's time fo' some reorganizin', somewhere. Want a fight, hunh? Well, yo' sho' come to the right address to get yo' ordeh filled!"

MORE than a dozen scheduled or un-scheduled stops lay behind and the *Héloise* was far down Bayou Becasine, hauling out into Lake Zwa, which on ancient maps had been the Lac des Oies, the lake of the wild geese, when Ol' Man Cap'n saw the signal of distress.

Over against the lake shore, washing against the oozy edge of the marsh where he knew there was no fishing whatever, his keen old eyes had caught sight of a trim small cabin-cruiser. Then he focused his binoculars on her, and saw two things instantly. On her stubby little flagstaff was a small flag of the United States, upside down. And on the cabin roof a tiny figure was making wild gestures with some kind of white cloth, probably a sheet torn off a bunk.

"Notheh city fisherman in trouble, I reckon," grumbled Didier to himself. But he swung the *Héloise* around, heading toward the spot, and signaled with his whistle that the plea for help had been seen. The sheet-waver stopped his gyrations and left the cabin roof.



"Here, Julie." His voice was low but commanding. "Nothing's going to hurt you. Nobody's going to bother you."

THE STEAMBOAT MAN

Down the speaking-tube Ol' Man Cap'n blew a resounding blast, and ordered Sugarhoof out forward with the lead for soundings. He knew that lake shoaled toward its shores. An hour later, by aid of a tow-rope and the skiff, the little cruiser was lashed securely alongside the *Héloise*. Bob Lomax was in the pilot-house thanking Ol' Man Cap'n between swallows of Hawghead's famous dripped coffee, "hotter'n hell, blacker'n sin, and stronger'n religion."

"Yo' city fishe'men ought to have a guardeen appointed to go with yo'-all befo' they let yo' down in this neck o' the woods," had been Didier's greeting; and with apologies for the trouble he had caused, Bob Lomax had introduced himself and let it go at that. Caught in a sudden squall the evening before, he explained, his spare drum of gasoline had been washed overboard, his supply in the fuel-tank had run out, and he could no longer keep the little cruiser head-on into the wind. He had tried to make a sea-anchor of lashed pirogue paddles and such bits of wood as he could rip from the inside fittings, but the waves had tossed him about, the rudder had smashed on a shell reef close under the surface, and though the stout little hull didn't open, he had been washed against the oozy marsh of the lake shore and there had pounded all night amid bursts of driving rain.

"Outside piracy, mutiny, sinkin' an' drownin', yo' sho' didn't have much left to happen to yo', son," chuckled Didier, "less'n yo' food an' wateh give out! Bet-teh have some mo' o' Hawghead's cawfee, with a shot o' likkeh in it to put hair on its chest."

He liked the looks and manners of this young man, he decided after the first ten minutes. Bob Lomax was in his mid-twenties, rangy and clean-limbed. His pleasant, tanned face was topped by close-cropped dark red hair, and his eyes were gray and steady. His hands looked big and hard and competent. And Ol' Man Cap'n liked the respectful "sir" with which the youth addressed him. Too many youngsters these days, Didier held, had no more manners than a bull alligator.

PLEASANTLY they trudged along down toward the coast—Ol' Man Cap'n, pleased as Punch at the intelligence and interest with which young Lomax asked him about this strange land and its stranger folk, delivering what

amounted to a monologue on his country and its people.

And it was mid-afternoon before the fright and grief of little Julie Dupuy was added to the cargo of the *Héloise* on this voyage, which Didier already was beginning to consider his "damnedest trip."

NO answering signal waved from Chenière Chighizola landing, as the *Héloise* rumbled toward it.

"Damned funny," Ol' Man Cap'n said to Bob Lomax, in a tone that indicated it wasn't funny at all. "Usu'lly, Julie, she's out theah firin' her brass cannon befo' I can toot on the whistle. Then she runs up my flag."

"What is the place, Captain?" asked Lomax with interest. "Fort, with a girl commanding it?"

"Sho' did sound lak it, at that," chuckled Didier. "But it aint neahly so warlike. Julie Dupuy, she's got an ol' brass salutin' cannon off'n some yacht they broke up in N'Awlyins. She'n' her dad, they done put it theah long-time ago. Ol' Colonel Dupuy, he was an Army doctor. Retired from the Medical Corps an' come back to Louisiana to live. Used to fire a sunrise gun an' hoist the flag on that pole every morning; fire anotheh gun an' lower it every night. When he died, Julie kinda kept it up. Had a special flag made t' run up fo' me, too. Blue with a white pelican on it, and '*Héloise*' in white lettehs. Right pretty."

Ol' Man Cap'n scrutinized the *chenière* through his glasses.

"Damned funny," he repeated. "No flag flyin' a-tall. Don't see nobody movin' aroun' the place. Jus' make out the stern o' Julie's li'l cruiseh in the end o' th' boat-house, so looks lak she aint away on no trip."

"I don't want to seem too nosey, Captain," said Bob Lomax. "But what are folks like that doing living 'way down here on the outside edge of nowhere?"

"Easy told," said Didier. "Ol' Doc Dupuy, he used to have a fishin' an' huntin' camp down heah on Chenière Chighizola. Then he done bought the whole *chenière*. It's 'bout five miles long, yo' notice; 'bout mile or two wide. When his wife died, he was workin' on something he called research. Tropical diseases. He'd done a lot o' Army service in the tropics. Out in the Philippines, an' Hawaii, an' Panama. Julie, she kinda took afteh her dad. She aint rightly no full-fledged doctor, what I

mean. Bi-ol-o-gist, they calls it, if'n I remembereh rightly. Well, the Colonel, he didn't want to live in their house in N'-Awlyins wheah his wife done died, so he fixes up what he calls his lab'ratory down heah, an' goes on with his research, and Julie works with him. Then he dies befo' his work is finished, and leaves ordehs when he's dyin' he wants to be buried right heah because he likes the spot, an' he leaves enough money so's Julie's got enough to live on, and she's tryin' t' finish up that research work o' his, lak, she says, a kinda monument to his memory in his profession."

"But you say she isn't a doctor, herself?"

"Son," said Ol' Man Cap'n, "I done seen plenty fellas with M.D. behind theah names in my time, didn't know as much 'bout doctorin' as she does! What she does up 'n' down these bayous takin' care o' folks too poor to bring a doctor all the way down heah, well, Father Girault, I done tol' yo' about, he's a medical missionary with one o' them M.D. things he can wear behin' his name, and he says what Julie does down heah might get her in jail fo' practicin' medicine without a license on this earth, but it sho' as hell is goin' to get her a front seat in heaven when she dies. That is," Ol' Man Cap'n added hastily, "Father Girault, he don't say 'sho' as hell,' but that's what he means. Why, that girl, she's set broken bones, an' she's nursed feveh patients, an' she's helped to birth babies down heah, when they wasn't nobody else would stir a hand or shake a laig in miles."

"Some girl, it sounds like," said Bob Lomax.

"Son, yo' sho' said yo'se'f a mouthful that time," said Ol' Man Cap'n; "and by God, she's prettier'n a speckled pup, too. Wondeh what in hell's happened at Chenière Chighizola?"

NOW they were drawing to the landing. Didier let a mighty blast from the *Héloise's* whistle sound through the air. The guards of the little steamboat came alongside the wharf-apron and Hawghead and Sugarhoof leaped ashore and swiftly lashed the mooring-lines to the piling.

"Damned funny!" Ol' Man Cap'n spoke ominously again. "No sign o' Pete an' Lize, them two nigghehs keeps house fo' her. No sign o' Portuguese Joe. He's a turtle-hunteh, son. Catches terrapin out in the marsh. Got a shack oveh yondeh behin' them trees."

He turned to his crew.

"Snakehips, yo' stay aboa'd. Hawghead an' Sugahhoof, yo' rustle that stuff we got fo' Miss Julie up to the house, an' stack it in her kitchen shed. Son,"—he turned to Bob Lomax,—“yo' an' me, we'll look around.”

TO Bob Lomax, it was an amazing house they entered under the shelter of those giant, moss-draped live oaks. It was heavy-timbered, the four corners held by heavy wire hawsers that led to buried ground-anchors, against the force of the hurricanes that from time to time sweep the coast. A wide copper-screened gallery surrounded it on all four sides; copper screens protected the windows against the mosquito swarms at night that, Ol' Man Cap'n had told him, "was all that kept this country from being plumb heaven." Evidently, Dr. Dupuy had learned his lesson of insect protection during his service in the tropics.

Inside stretched a great living-room, with a big, low brick fireplace, low and comfortable chairs, and shelves of books lining every available inch of wall. Tables of magazines, a baby grand piano with sheets of music open on the rack, a radio in a corner, showed that Julie Dupuy had comforts in her self-imposed exile from cities. Electric lights indicated the presence of a gasoline-driven power-plant somewhere about the premises. They were burning, too; and listening a moment, the throb of the motor in its distant shed under the trees could be heard.

"Damned funny!" Ol' Man Cap'n said again. "Julie aint the kind to go rushin' off leavin' lights burnin', even if'n she does get a check from the bank every month!"

One corner of the house was fitted with laboratory equipment. But though the test-tubes, slides, and electric heaters all were in spotless condition, tracks of mud about the house showed that there had been visitors who, Ol' Man Cap'n pondered: "Sho' as hell neveh was Lize nor that husband Pete o' hers; she'd 'a' crowned him with a broom-handle did he ever track in mud lak that! An' ol' Portuguese Joe, he neveh sets his foot inside this front do'."

Not a soul was in the house. Not a soul was in any of the little group of out-buildings. In the boathouse, Julie's little cabin-cruiser seemed in perfect condition, until Bob Lomax tested the motor.

"Monkeyed with the magneto, hunh!" said Ol' Man Cap'n, when Lomax showed



"As for what happens here tonight, I and my men will have a word to say about that. . . . You have given orders here too long."

unintelligible to Bob Lomax. And at the end of it, Portuguese Joe darted off toward the far edge of the *chenière*.

"We'll go back to the house, son," said Ol' Man Cap'n, and there was a steely edge to his voice that Bob Lomax had not heard all that day of almost endless monologue. The gentle, drawling, friendly, talkative old man seemed to have been forged suddenly into a human sword-blade by the intense heat and impact of a great and terrible anger.

"No!" he said suddenly. "Betteh yo' go to th' house an' wait. I'll join yo' theah mighty soon."

"What's it all about, Captain?" asked the young man.

"Son," Didier said slowly, "mostly we don't talk 'bout ouah troubles down heah to folks from outside. But I reckon if'n yo' unde'stand a li'l bit 'bout this business, yo' can be some help, cheerin' up Julie when she gets back. She's had a bad scare. Be nice to her. Get her talkin' 'bout somethin' else."

"Anything I can do, Captain," said Bob Lomax. "I don't want to ask any questions you don't want me to ask, but get her talking about something else than what?"

"Reckon yo' got a license to ask that, son. Yo' prob'ly neveh done hear in yo' life 'bout a felleh call' Hardshell Crepelle, down thisaway. Jean Crepelle, his name is. Kinda rough customer. Been stickin' out his neck, lately. Well, he an' some o' the rats that trails with him, they done drop in heah las' night, while

him. "Well, I be damn'! We'll search this whole endurin' *chenière*."

They started through the grove of live oaks, calling from time to time. For nearly a mile their search was fruitless; then a man stepped from behind a tree.

"Joe!" It was Ol' Man Cap'n who recognized the sun-dried figure of Portuguese Joe, in jumper and overalls and sagging felt hat.

There followed a swift interchange in bayou Cajun French that was utterly

yo' was havin' yo' troubles with that squall on Lake Zwa. Looked kinda natch'l, anybody puttin' in at a *chenière* fo' shelteh, with a heavy squall coming up. Julie, she fixes up somethin' hot fo' 'em to eat. Then this fella Crepelle, he wants her to go to this pay-day dance at Placide Platform with him tonight. Damn' scoundrel! He knows a li'l lady like Julie Dupuy aint goin' nowheah's with him, an' he knows Big Octave would throw him off'n Placide Platform if'n he eveh set foot on the wharf.

"Well, Julie, she natch'l'y don' believe her ears. She's known 'bout him plenty, lak most folks down heah knows. And she knows how things stand between him an' Big Octave. Only reason she even let him in last night was she's the kind who wouldn't turn a gutteh-pup out into weatheh lak was cookin' up then. Portuguese Joe done come to the house to see if'n eve'ything was braced fo' the squall, an' he was out in the kitchen with Lize and Pete, an' he heahs Julie tell Crepelle, no thanks, she don't care to go to the dance with him, an' he says why not? She kinda loses her temper then, lak she's got a right to, and she says because she don't want to, and because he knows he couldn't go to anything on Placide Platform while Big Octave's livin'."

Ol' Man Cap'n stopped, rolled a cigarette of his black Cajun string tobacco, lit it, inhaled deeply, and swore.

"That damned bayou rat askin' ol' Colonel Dupuy's li'l gal to go to a shrimp-platform dance with him!" he ended.

"What happened?" asked Bob Lomax.

"Portuguese Joe says that the whole gang musta been drunk, way they acted," continued Ol' Man Cap'n. "Crepelle tells Julie he goes where he wants with whoever he wants, an' nobody on this coast is goin' to stop him. Not Big Octave, nor anybody else. He reaches out fo' her lak he is goin' to grab her arm, an' Julie slaps his face an' runs through the kitchen do', an' it aint got no lock, but Joe, he shoves a chair-back undeh the knob, an' it holds jus' long 'nough fo' him t' tell 'em, come on and folleh him.

"They ducks out undeh the trees, an' thank Gawd, it's just gettin' dark. They knows wheah they're goin', an' the half-dozen rats with Crepelle, they don't. Theah's a li'l bayou, almost lak a canal, back o' this *chenière*, runs down into the marsh. Joe's got himself a good-sized pirogue he keeps theah, fo' his turtle-huntin'. An' 'bout three-fo' miles down

it, he has a shack he camps in now an' then. Just one room on stilts, but it's weathehproof. So he paddles 'em down theah, and they stay all night. Joe always keeps some canned food an' some watch an' a charcoal stove down theah, so they don't suffer none. This mornin' they're afraid to come back fo' fear Crepelle and his gang might be hangin' round yet. Then this aftehnoon, Joe he scouts up to see if'n they've gone. And that's when we done come along."

"He's gone after them now?"

"Nothin' else. Now listen, son. I been thinkin'. Heah—"

Ol' Man Cap'n brought out a key-ring and took off a key.

"That opens th' lockeh in th' pilot house. Yo'll find some shotguns an' a 30-30 rifle theah, an' my ol' six-shooter. 'Stead o' waitin' at the house, yo' go aboa'd an' see them guns is all cleaned an' oiled an' loaded. Boxes o' shells in the bottom o' the lockeh. No tellin' what we-all's likely to run into befo' this party's oveh. I'll stay heah an' meet Julie my ownself."

IT was nearly an hour later that Bob Lomax, his weapon-cleaning and loading job completed, rose to his feet in the pilot-house of the *Héloise* to be presented to the slim and rounded girl with crisp dark hair tumbled about her proudly carried head, and warm brown eyes.

"Miss Julie Dupuy," said Ol' Man Cap'n with old-fashioned courtesy, "permit me to present Mist' Bob Lomax, who done had his own troubles las' night."

Julie Dupuy thrust out her firm small hand in a boyish grip.

"Miss Julie, she done decided to come along with us, son," went on Ol' Man Cap'n. "I done tol' her yo' an' me, we saw Portuguese Joe the same time, and he tol' us what happened heah last night. Joe, he's stayin' behind to keep an eye out fo' *Cheniére Chighizola*. Pete an' Lize, they're below. I'm takin' Miss Julie back to N'Awlyins, so's she can stay with her aunt until some things gets straightened out down thisaway. But we gotta stop at Placide Platform befo' we head back to town. Big Octave's countin' on me to deliveh them barrels o' wine for his party. An' I gotta have some talk with Big Octave my ownself. Now yo' two young folks make yo'selves to home on the *Héloise*."

They certainly had made themselves at home on the *Héloise*, Didier Dauterive was thinking, now that the lights of

Placide Platform gleamed through the dusk, across Bay St. Anthony. Showed how much even a girl bi-ol-o-gist needed to have somebody her own age and her own kind of folks around her, once in a while, he meditated.

Then, thinking of the war-talk he was soon to hold with Big Octave about Hardshell Crepelle, anger flooded him once more, and his grip on the steering-wheel spokes tightened.

"Hardshell, yo' sho' done pushed the button an' started somethin'," Ol' Man Cap'n gritted through his teeth, "Now we-all goin' to find out damned soon are you man enough to finish it!"

Flaring torches played with a weird light over the wooden-floored expanse of Placide Platform as the *Héloise* drew up alongside the wharf apron, her whistle bellowing through the dark. A great bed of glowing cordwood embers gleamed beneath the big steaming caldron where Euzebe Landry, Big Octave's cook, was putting the last touches to a gumbo in which swam shrimp and chopped crabs, oysters and cubes of ham, in a heavenly sea of tomatoes and okra blended with fragrant herbs, while a row of huge boilers near by were filled with fluffy fresh-cooked rice to give it body. Tables held long loaves of crusty French bread, high-piled, and on clay braziers that were beds of glowing charcoal, big coffee-pots steamed.

Already the musicians were tuning up. Pierre Decareaux was drawing soft preliminary strains from his big accordion. Ermanagil Subra's fingers were trying out the strings of his guitar, while beside him Philogene St. Amant was getting his refractory steel-stringed banjo in tune and Raoul Boudreaux was breathing some chords on his big harmonica. And Raoul Desobry was letting a laughing, bright-eyed girl tap out a rhythm on his steel triangle that a little later would punctuate the dance-music.

But they all stopped as they heard the whistle of the *Héloise*.

Here at last was Ol' Man Cap'n with the long-awaited wine!

Down to the edge of the platform wharf they made a concerted rush, Big Octave in the midst of it, his ponderous body moving like a battleship amid a fleet of bobbing tugs. Scores of hands stretched out to grasp and make fast the mooring-ropes, as the *Héloise* nosed in slowly amid the thick fringe of luggers, work-boats, weather-worn cabin-cruisers, pirogues and john-boats.

They had surged aboard, even before Hawghead and Sugarhoof could put out the stage-planks. And once they were out, up the incline those scores of hands rolled the six big barrels of strong red wine. Less than ten minutes passed before those barrels stood on end, ringing the dancing-floor, their heads deftly removed, the hook-handled tin dippers hanging invitingly around the edge.

Then the music struck up for the first dance, and Big Octave's Placide Platform pay-day party was on.

It was a sight worth traveling to see, there beneath the high, dark, star-studded arch of the open sky. It was the girls of bayou and swamp settlement and distant *chenière* who wore the party clothes, dresses white or light in color, gay with bright ribbons. The clothes of the men who danced with them ranged from the pale blue-white of often-scoured jumpers and overalls, to the comparative full dress of dark trousers and white shirts. Shoes of heavy black leather, grayed by frequent immersion in salt water, thumped the candle-waxed boards of the platform alongside the smoothly sliding slippers those girls brought out for nights such as these.

Here were men with money in their pockets after a season of battle with storm, of dogged endurance against blazing tropic sun, after long hours of immersion in salt water, and the heavy labor of hauling the loaded seines. Here were men whose feet bore the white scars of the "stingarees" on which they had trod while working the seines, shoulder-deep in the waters of the Gulf, to know the stabbing agony of those needle-pointed, barbed bone lances driven through their feet, and to know that they must be hauled the whole way through with pliers, and the raw wound drenched with burning iodine, for to drag out a sting-ray's lance backward meant mangled flesh past human bearing. These were men who had lived on rough rations cooked over charcoal braziers aboard their luggers, washed down with great draughts of raw black coffee.

BUT all of this was forgotten now. Big Octave's pay-day party was on.

In the first uproarious surge of it, Ol' Man Cap'n had drawn Big Octave to a quiet spot on the far side of the *Héloise's* deck. Swiftly, in short sentences, Ol' Man Cap'n sketched for Big Octave the happenings of the night before at *Chenièr* Chighizola, and the brief and stinging

profanity of Big Octave punctuated the tale to which he listened, like the pinging impact of bullets on steel.

"*Sacre nom de ventre de poisson de St. Pierre!*" swore Big Octave at the end, and when a man down that coast swears by the holy name of the belly of a fish of St. Peter the Fisherman, he has little left by which to swear.

"Not Hardshell Crepelle nor one of his rats has come to Placide yet tonight, Ol' Man Cap'n," he told Didier Dauterive. "And now that I know his boast, if they do—"

He shrugged his giant shoulders, and that gesture was even more eloquent than his oaths.

"I got four shotguns on the *Héloise*," contributed Ol' Man Cap'n, "all cleaned and loaded with buckshot, and plenty shells. An' one high-poweh rifle an' my six-shooteh."

"They might help," conceded Big Octave. "We got a few duck-guns here at Placide, our own selves, from th' market-hunting days."

The market-hunter's gun of that coast, no longer legal with the conservation laws, was a double-barreled eight-gauge designed to bring down the greatest possible number of wild duck in sight and range—as deadly almost as point-blank, muzzle-burst shrapnel when used on men.

"I'll send four of my men from the platform crew aboard, Didier," continued Octave, after a brief moment's thought. "They aint so young they're still crazy about dancing. You give 'em those shotguns, and keep 'em aboard. When you hear me holler your name, you and them come a-running."

"ONE favor I ask, Octave." There was a somber tone, grim and deadly, in Ol' Man Cap'n's swift French at that moment. "Colonel Dupuy was my friend. I know even better than you, how his daughter has done the work of an angel of mercy on these bayous. This Jean Crepelle, he and I, we have a personal account as well. He is my enemy. I would like to stand face to face with him for one moment."

"That, Didier, happens as it happens," said Big Octave, equally somber. "Crepelle knows I have warned him and his men never to set foot on Placide Platform. He knows what it means if he does. Sometimes, old friend, affairs move too fast for plans. No man can say what will happen once guns are out. This man is a boaster, but he is deadly

as a congo.* I think he has gone more than a little mad in his dream to be the biggest man on the bayous. He is younger than you, Didier. I would not have my old friend needlessly hurt. But I know how you feel. We shall see what we shall see."

And Big Octave strode to his own wharf, to summon his picked men, while Ol' Man Cap'n went aloft to the pilot-house to break out his guns.

JULIE DUPUY and Bob Lomax were on the upper deck of the *Héloise*, watching the swirling scene spread before their eyes, as Didier emerged at the head of the stairs leading from below.

"They sure seem to be having a swell time, Captain," called Lomax. "Your friend Crepelle arrived at the party yet?"

"Not yet, son," said Didier. "Yo' all right, Julie?"

"Fine," she called cheerily.

Youth's swift resilience already had thrown off the fright of the night before.

Into the pilot-house went Didier Dauterive, mind intent on the weapons in the locker.

"Look here, Julie." Bob Lomax's voice was vibrant. "What say we join the party? Just for one dance, anyway. That music's too good to go to waste."

"Why—" There was a moment's hesitancy in her voice, and then: "Well, why not?" said Julie Dupuy. After all, it had been a long time since dance-music had sounded in her ears, save over the radio or on her piano at Chenière Chighizola. Longer yet since she had heard one so close to her own age asking her to dance. And suddenly it dawned on her that she'd love to dance with this tall youth of the friendly voice and eyes and the big, competent hands.

"Well, why not?" said Julie Dupuy again, meditatively.

"Let's go," said Bob Lomax.

Swiftly they went down the steps to the deck below. Up the gangplank they walked, side by side, and came to the edge of the dancing-floor. Then Bob Lomax's arm slipped around her waist, and her hand rested in his, and they swung into the crowd of dancers, moving smoothly to the music.

* Congo: The name by which the bayou, swamp and coastal folk of Louisiana know the cotton-mouth moccasin, at home equally in the water or on the land, one of the deadliest snakes of the Louisiana coast.

Overhead arched the wide expanse of black velvet, studded with the silver-headed nails of the stars, that is Louisiana's night-time sky. Clean and soft and salt, the sea-breeze brushed their faces. All about them was movement and laughter. Far over on the horizon the first hint of a great gold moon began to show.

"I like this country of yours," said Bob Lomax.

"I've loved it ever since I can remember," said Julie Dupuy.

"I can begin to understand why," he said. "In fact, the only thing I can't understand is why the men you must know haven't made a bridge of boats down to your door."

"Poet and flatterer," she laughed. But her color heightened, and he saw it.

And then, suddenly, he found words struggling to be uttered by his own lips that he wouldn't have believed possible twenty-four hours before. This sort of thing didn't really happen, he told himself. But it had happened.

"See here, Julie," he began, but the words he had started to say stopped in mid-career, for abruptly the music to which they were dancing had stopped, and the sudden silence was like a noise in itself, and all about them men and girls had stopped dancing in mid-swing, too, and all were looking at the end of the wharf apron nearest them. There

on the platform edge stood a small, compact group of men, and in front of them a heavy-set man with huge shoulders and a dark face sinister in its lines as he looked about him with a grin that held no mirth.

Julie Dupuy's fingers clutched Bob Lomax with a swift, nervous contraction.

"What's the trouble, Julie?" he asked.

"Over there," she said, for his back was toward the group. "Jean Crepelle. Oh, now there *will* be trouble!"

His arm still about her waist, Bob swung around and with his eyes followed the path all those other eyes were taking.

"Oh," he said, quietly. "That the lad out in front? This friendly little soul they call Hardshell Crepelle?"

"Yes," was all she said. But there was terror in her tone, and her face had gone dead white.

Bob Lomax felt the involuntary shudder that ran through her slim body. Equally involuntarily, his arm tightened around her.

"Here, Julie." His voice was low, but it was commanding. "Here, girl. That won't do. Nothing's going to hurt you. Nobody's going to bother you. Please believe me."

He was holding her close to his side, now; closer than he knew. For suddenly her head went down and was buried in his shoulder. She couldn't help it; she hated herself for it; but she was crying.

"Don't, Julie! Don't!" He was patting her shoulder with his free hand now. His other arm was holding her tightly, protectingly. With a great effort at control, she drew back, dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief she produced from somewhere, and looked up at him.



At last the knockout came. . . . It ended such a fight as Placide Platform never had seen before.

"Sorry," she said. "I'm a little fool. But I got so scared last night. Some of those men had been taking drugs. It was so plain to anybody who knows anything about them. It's a shock to see them again." Then, the note of terror rising in her voice once more: "Ooooh! Look! He's coming straight at us!"

He was. And his men were close behind him. Through the loosely grouped crowd that had been dancing a moment before, they bored, hard-faced, intent, some dozen of them behind their leader. And toward them, through the crowd, equally intent, even harder of face, bored Big Octave Légros, boss of Placide.

Face to face he came with Hardshell Crepelle, when only a few feet from the spot where Julie Dupuy and Bob Lomax stood. And it was Big Octave who spoke first. In the bayou French he spoke, but his meaning was clear in any language.

"Crepelle, you rat!" he said. "I told you never to set foot on Placide Platform. Have you forgotten?"

Even more sinister grew the face of Hardshell Crepelle as he smiled.

"But all the coast knows," he mocked, "that all the coast is invited when Big Octave Légros gives his famous dance. I had planned to do it honor by coming with Miss Julie Dupuy. But I see she prefers another. That, I hope, will not keep her from having at least one dance with me before the evening is over."

BIG OCTAVE had been scrutinizing Hardshell Crepelle as he spoke. Now there was a tone of sheer wonder in the voice of the boss of Placide.

"Tell me, Crepelle," he said. "I am curious. Are you drunk? Have you been taking the drugs you smuggle? Or are you mad? For unless you are drunk, drugged or mad, you know what happens to you here tonight."

"Neither drunk, drugged nor mad, fat man," said Hardshell Crepelle. "And as for what happens here tonight, I and my men will have a word to say about that. They told me," he mocked again, "that these parties you give at Placide grow rough. Peaceful as I am, in spite of all I could say, they came armed. Two pistols each. And clips to spare. I would advise you not to start what could happen if you, for example, should hit me. Even if you should seize and try to detain me."

"Oho!" There was titanic laughter in the voice of Big Octave. "Pistols to my party! But yet you have not an-

swered me. You and your men and all your pistols, you know you will not kill every human being on Placide tonight. Here are witnesses. And courts have not ceased in Louisiana. Nor sheriffs."

"Nor politics, fat man," retorted Crepelle, openly offensive now. "And since you speak of courts and sheriffs, must I remind you that up front our sheriff and our district judge are running for re-election, with strong opposition, but not opposition strong enough to win without the money and the votes those two will get from me. They will not help you this time, Légros. And they are far away tonight. And that is why I call your bluff that you are the big man of the coast. You have given orders down here too long. This time you learn to take them."

HE paused and glared into the eyes of the boss of Placide, whose word for years had been law to many men.

"You take my orders from now on, fat one," he said, his jaw outthrust. "And the first one is, order the music to start again so that I may do honor to this party by dancing with Julie Dupuy. And remember, I have my own witnesses if you start anything, Légros."

There was a moment of deadly silence. Then Big Octave wheeled as though to shout his command to the musicians. His voice rang out, full-throated, distinct; but it was not subservient execution of an order. It was a battle-bellow.

"Fall back! All of you! Duck-guns, here! Didier, here!"

There had been a brief space of relaxation in the group of Crepelle's men as Big Octave turned, apparently to do as he was told. It was their undoing. For before they could realize what was happening, Big Octave, who had leaped cat-like for all his weight to one side, was shouting at them:

"Up with your hands, rats of Crepelle! Shotguns cover you in front and behind. Buckshot. Make one move to draw a pistol, and you all are dead!"

And as his bellowed words reached their understanding, they saw the looming muzzles of a dozen of those eight-gauge market-hunters' duck-guns bearing down on them from one of the little cabins that lined the platform edge. Those of the group who looked over their shoulders with swift glance, saw other gun-muzzles from the *Héloise* covering their backs.

That swift stroke of uncertainty as they realized what a shotgun volley into

their close-packed group would do, topped them in utter defeat. Sullenly their hands rose.

"One man for each!" Again Big Octave's bellow blasted through the night. "Up out of the crowd! Disarm them! Tie them, ankles and wrists behind their backs. Jean-Pierre, here with that seine-cord!"

Five minutes had not passed before a pile of heavy automatics, a pile of knives, lay at Big Octave's feet, and the members of the band that so few moments before had strode menacingly across that platform lay bound upon it, Hardshell Crepelle among the rest. But he was defiant, even if disarmed and bound.

"Your game now, fat man," he gritted. "But I have waited before. I can wait again."

"You do your waiting in hell, this time, Crepelle." Big Octave's voice was grim. "Are you sure?"

"Sure as I am that Ol' Man Cap'n is better with a pistol than you, for all his age. For I have promised you to him tonight."

Old Didier Dauterive was by his side now, battle-light flaming in his eyes, tense as a bloodhound straining at leash.

"Let him up, Octave," he begged. "I'm ready. Here's my gun. Give him his pistol, and yo'-all stand aside. He don't deserve dyin' like a white man with a gun in his hand, but I got to face my God some day. Let him up!"

THEN another voice sounded—a voice strange to most of those on the platform. Out of the crowd where he had left Julie Dupuy with two of the women whom she knew, strode Bob Lomax.

"Wait a minute," he said. And there was such a note of command in his voice that voices and motion ceased.

"Sorry to take your Christmas gift away from you, Ol' Man Cap'n," he said. "Octave Légros, you're in command here, I take it."

"I'm boss of Placide Platform," said Big Octave simply, but with all the authority of a King of France who said, equally simply: "I am the State."

"My compliments to you, sir," said young Bob Lomax. "It's a big place and a big job. Only I happen to represent the United States of America. And,"—whimsically,—“they used to teach me the whole is greater than any of its parts.”

Stepping close to Big Octave Légros, the young man opened his coat. A gold badge gleamed.

"Robert Lomax of the United States Immigration Service," he re-introduced himself to Ol' Man Cap'n and Big Octave, "even if Cap'n Didier did mistake me for a city fisherman. And this Crepelle rat belongs to us."

"How come?" demanded Ol' Man Cap'n, battle-light gleaming yet in his eyes, and Big Octave's eyebrows rose questioningly.

"The *Morning Star* case," said Bob Lomax simply, while the eyes of the bound Hardshell Crepelle glared up at him malevolently. "You don't like to remember the *Morning Star* any too well, do you, Crepelle? Chinese-running job," he explained to Ol' Man Cap'n and Big Octave. "One of those things you hear about now and then, and hate to believe. Took 'em on at Puerto Mexico. Knocked 'em on the head and dropped 'em over-side, weighted, about a mile off the Louisiana coast when he knew the fog wouldn't last and the Coast Guard was close on his heels. Eighteen of 'em. Got his thousand dollars apiece when they came aboard. No evidence when the Coast Guard picked him up. Just a fishing-trip. But two of his men on the *Morning Star* got caught on a drug-running job over Mobile way, and they squealed on Crepelle to make it easier for them. Never thought Pinky Dwyer and Pete Olsen would bob up again to bite you, did you, Crepelle? Then we got a little coöperation out of Mexico City and we tied up the Puerto Mexico end of it. Looks very much as if you swing for it, Crepelle. If it's any consolation to you, you'll be tried before a Federal judge you didn't help elect, and if you swing, it'll be on Government property."

AGAIN he turned to Big Octave and Ol' Man Cap'n.

"I was scouting out the section, when my cruiser cracked up on me, and the *Héloise* picked me up," he explained. "I just let the 'city-fisherman' stuff ride. But I was heading for Chéramie Platform to bring this boy home."

"A moment, my friend," said Big Octave. "Single-handed you were going to Chéramie Platform for this man?"

"What d'you think a man needs to bring in a yellow murderer like him? The Army and the Marines? And while you're about it, please untie him and let him up."

"You have handcuffs for him?" asked Big Octave.

"No. I only had this," said Bob Lomax. And from a shoulder-holster the Government automatic flashed in his hand.

"But you cannot keep that trained on him all the way into New Orleans."

"I know," said Bob Lomax patiently. "You can tie him up again after I get through with him. Or I will."

The automatic went into his shoulder holster again. Then coat and holstered pistol both lay at his feet.

"I only wanted to show his gang of yellow rats what a false alarm their big tough boss is," explained Bob Lomax. "They'll scatter when he's where the birds can't peck at him. But he's got a shellacking coming to him for making a pass at Miss Dupuy last night, and I've earned the fun of handing it to him. So calm down, Ol' Man Cap'n. If you killed him with that horse-pistol of yours and I brought him in dead, there'd have to be explanations. It won't matter if I drag him in with a couple of black eyes and his nose a little flatter. He's no beauty, anyway."

"Don't do it, son." There was genuine concern in Ol' Man Cap'n's voice. "He's forty pounds heavier than you."

"And all of it yellow," said Bob Lomax. "Yellow as the skins of those Chinese he murdered. Let him up. If he kills me, take him in to the Immigration office at New Orleans. No need for you to have to pay for killing him. Uncle Sam'll do it free. Now let him up."

From Hardshell Crepelle's lips a stream of obscene oaths spouted, with the promise: "Turn me loose, and I'll kill you with my bare hands."

"Only way you'll get a chance, rat," said Bob Lomax calmly, and stripped off his shirt.

Dubiously, as Big Octave nodded, two men released the cords that held Crepelle at wrist and ankle.

"Now, rat, come on and fight," said Bob Lomax.

OF that fight, they tell you yet, from Côte Blanche and Cypremort on the west to the Chandeleurs on the east. It was rapier against battle-ax; it was stinging wasp against maddened bull elephant. And twice before the sheer weight of Crepelle's maddened rushes and wild swings, Bob Lomax went down.

But each time he was on his feet and dancing away, covered, before Crepelle could inflict punishing damage. And deliberately he was cutting Crepelle's face

into mincemeat. At last the bayou bully stood with closed eyes, his nose smashed against his face, and his face a red mask from the lashing knuckles of the youth who fought coolly and pitilessly, taunting the man he was taking in to where the shadow of a noosed rope loomed at the end of the trail. . . .

At last the knockout came. It ended such a fight as Placide Platform never had seen before, and Placide had seen its share of fights in its time.

"Now, if you've got some iodine for these knuckles," said Bob Lomax to Big Octave, "tie up this great gang-leader and start the music again and let me finish the dance he broke up."

Ol' Man Cap'n's wiry arm was around his shoulders.

"Boy!" breathed the master of the *Héloise*. "If I had a son like you, I could die happy. And now," as a sudden thought struck him, "nobody can say I done shot a man to stop competition!"

"What's that?"

"'Notheh story, son. Tell yo' sometime."

THE moon was setting as Bob Lomax and Julie Dupuy walked to the far edge of Placide Platform. She was holding close to his arm.

"I was so frightened," she said, "when you went down those two times."

"You mean it meant anything to you?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you," she said softly.

He was groping for words himself, and he picked up hers gratefully.

"Trying to tell," said Bob Lomax, "Julie, d'you know I was trying my damndest to tell *you* something when Crepelle and his gang climbed aboard this platform."

The moonlight shone full on her face, and he saw what he saw.

"Julie," he began, "you know we don't get rich in Government service—but—"

"Rich in money?" she said. "Oh, but I did not think you were that stupid! Was that what you were trying to tell me?"

"Part of it," he stumbled on.

"Why not finish it?" she asked. "Or do Government men finish only one thing an evening, like the *Morning Star* case?"

So he finished it.

"And Ol' Man Cap'n thought you were just a city fisherman," she whispered a little later, when she could whisper.

"Well, look what I caught!" said Bob Lomax.



Lady of the Cannibal Islands

The first of a colorful series about Jimmy-the-Rag and Nor'west Jane and the other picturesque people far beyond the South Seas tourist routes.

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

LOMBARD the anthropologist—the youthful, yellow-haired anthropologist, who hadn't a beard, and didn't look the least bit like the doddering old scientist we all know in plays (the one who wanders about with his hands behind his back, and talks in polysyllables, and never knows that the leading man is making love to his wife), had landed from the steamer, and was very glad indeed to be back in Papua again.

It was night; the island town, circled by moveless palm-trees, lay hot and panting beneath the white-hot stars. Lombard took off his coat, and carrying it over one arm, made for the tin hotel. Midway up the street, he was arrested

by a curious scene—rather, a scene that would have been curious in any other land than the New Guineas, where everything goes, and nothing matters much.

A dead man was lying in the midst of the lamp-lit street. Candles had been set round about him, driven into the deep sand that paved the roadway. A white sheet was piously draped over him; only his head and his crossed hands could be seen, and the two stiff toes, pointing up beneath the sheet. His face was paper-colored, and his eyes were closed with two pennies. White flowers had been strewn upon his hands and breast.

This was remarkable, but still more remarkable was the demeanor of the people who were strolling and standing

about the broad main street, in the neighborhood of the corpse. Some of them took no notice. Others saluted in an exaggerated manner as they passed. One or two shouted sarcastic greetings. And as Lombard, sweating with amazement and the full weight of the north-west season night, neared the corpse, he saw, with unbelieving eyes, a number of apparently sane and respectable citizens join hands and gayly dance about the body, bellowing out the drinking-song of Papua: "Happy Days Are Here Again."

A tall figure in a crisp white frock showed dimly out of the shadows of the big mango trees ahead; and Lombard, wondering whether he could safely believe anything he saw, told himself that here was another impossibility, here was Island Jane.

ISLAND JANE, the ginger-haired, green-blue-eyed trader of the island that lay two hundred miles beyond Samarai; Jane, who last year, with Jimmy-the-Rag, had taken a job as dragoman and guide to himself among the island villages. And Jane was here, in Samarai town, and so was Jimmy-the-Rag, in the dusk of the mango trees, and so was he.

"Jane," he burst out, seizing her hand, "I'm glad to see you! What are you doing—and what in the name of common sense is this? Are they all mad?"

Jane replied, seriatim, as she usually did: "I'm glad to see yourself. I'm here fitting out to go recruiting. It's a lesson. Nobody isn't mad."

Lombard turned to Jimmy-the-Rag, prospector, pearler, sea-gypsy and good friend of Jane. "For heaven's sake—"

Jimmy-the-Rag exploded in a pleased laugh. "She's told you. You know what Jane is about 'learning' people. The man out there is her last pupil. She wanted him to go recruiting for her, and he went on the drink for about the nineteenth time."

"And—died?" Lombard asked in a hushed tone.

Jane broke in. "He'd ought to've died. Since he didn't, I took a hand. Maybe it seems queer to you," she said in an explanatory tone, "but I never did like booze nor boozers. Seems unrefined, if you know what I mean. So I done it."

The anthropologist put both hands on his temples. "Jimmy, save me," he pleaded. "Am I mad, and does Jane mean that she—"

Jimmy-the-Rag was opening his mouth to speak, when a sudden uproar drowned



Lombard began to count. Jane was pushing the anesthetic; he hoped their ruse would not fail.

his words. The wandering crowd had broken up, was pursuing, with shouts and yells of laughter, an amazing figure. The corpse—still draped with white, still more or less entangled in flowers—had risen from the ground, stumbled over and put out the candles, and was proceeding, in an extraordinary series of hops, down the main street, uttering inarticulate cries of dismay as it went.

Lombard said: "My God, he's alive!"

Jimmy-the-Rag pulled a large clasp-knife from his pocket, and ran after the corpse, opening the knife as he went.

"Finish him off! Give it to him!" resounded from the street.

"They are mad!" declared Lombard. "I've dropped into a lunatic asylum. I beg your pardon?"

Jane said: "He won't do it again, I reckon."

"Jimmy-the-Rag? I—"

He fell silent; words seemed insufficient for the occasion. Jimmy-the-Rag, swiftly running, caught up to the sheeted corpse, and after a brief struggle, slashed his knife across something—Lombard



Illustrated by
Joseph Nussdorf

couldn't see what; but nimbly the corpse desisted from its amazing progress of hops and leaps, and began to walk like a human being.

JIMMY, returning, calmly remarked: "He knows where he is now. Jane, you tied that ankle bandage too tight."

"How can you make a corpse that's a proper corpse without pointing its feet?" Jane defended. "What did he say?"

"Ladies present," remarked Jimmy, putting his pipe in his mouth as if to end the matter.

"I reckon he did," Jane elliptically observed. "It's the best way you ever knew, to cure a real bad boozier like Bat Jones; but I don't know for the life of me what they'd got to laugh about, like a mob sitting on a log."

"Jane," said Jimmy-the-Rag, pointing with the end of his pipe, "isn't burdened with a sense of humor, and that's what will make her what I've not been, a success in life. . . . Are you on for another scientific picnic?"

"Very much so," Lombard agreed.

"Well, do you see that native walking along the roadway?"

"The extraordinary little person about four feet ten—bent back from the waist like an acrobat—with no clothes but beads and impudence? Couldn't well miss him."

"Well, we're going in the new cutter that Jane bought, to recruit the like of him and his mates, on Lolok Island; and so's Bat Jones, if he keeps all right. Bat can do what hardly anyone else can, and that's talk the Lolok dialect; he was brought up among them as near as possible; his people went pearling about Lolok most of their time, when he was a youngster. Bat is a grand interpreter when he's off the drink; and what's more, the Lolok men know him, and they wouldn't scoff him even if he was a good bit wholesomer-looking than he is."

"Scoff? Do you mean—"

"Eat? Yes. They're the cheekiest little beggars in New Guinea—eat you as soon as look at you."

"And you expect to induce them to take plantation work?"

"Jane does. Recruiting's up now; six pounds for a two-year boy anywhere, and fifteen for a twelve-months' boy for mining."

Jane said: "That's right; and Jings, I need it, what with Jack down in Sydney, and his operations, and steamer-fares and all."

Lombard was silent for a moment. In the past six months he had forgotten a good bit—though not everything—about Island Jane; had quite forgotten about her invalid husband, crushed beneath a whaleboat on their wedding-day. He was not altogether glad to be reminded of the latter.

But he saw that Jimmy-the-Rag—that human problem, of history unknown; miner, pearler, gypsy of New Guinea—was watching him. And he made haste to accept, politely, Jimmy's and Jane's invitation.

The stray from Lolok, strutting proudly along the coral road, eyed them as he passed.

"What's the primitive savage staring at?" Lombard interestedly demanded.

"I reckon it's us," said Jimmy. "They come down now and then in their war-canoes, on what you might call a cruise. To see the queer places the white people live in, and the queer folk they are. But certainly that little devil is taking a good look. Specially at Jane and me. Now it ought to be you."

"Why?"

"Fatter. More crackling about you, if they had you on the spit, I reckon."

"Jimmy," Jane warned him, "don't you be vulgar."

Lombard said: "But it interests me tremendously. I should love to solve that difficulty, once for all, about the real origin of man-eating; whether it was simply a case of shortage of food, or whether the ceremonial idea—"

"One of them little jokers," Jane remarked, "asked Bat Jones once, when he was down on a cruise, as Jimmy calls it, what the white people meant by killing and eating them woolly pigs that said 'Bah!'—meaning imported sheep. He wanted to know, he said, if it was because they was good to eat, though they didn't look it, or if it was the white man's religion."

JIMMY exploded. Lombard, reluctantly, laughed. Jane cast a look of weary patience at both. Men were always, in her experience, guffawing over something that wasn't and couldn't be funny.

"If Bat's all right," she said, "we'll start day after tomorrow."

Two or three days later Jane, Lombard, Jimmy-the-Rag and the recent corpse Bat Jones, were three thousand feet up the sides of the great spiring island of Lolok, a long way still from the six-thousand-foot summit, which they did not propose to reach. They had come through forests thick as a beaver's fur, and hot (Jane declared) as the very hearthstone of hell; they had seen huge pythons drop from trees as they passed, and tiger-snakes, tortoiseshell-colored, swift and wicked, lash across the pathway. They had reached the lowest of the villages toward sundown; and now, in the falling dusk, Jane was seated on a log, her rifle laid across her trousered knees, her handsome face turned toward the headman of the village—talking.

Eloquently she explained the advantages of "signing on," the trade-goods to be acquired for the village, the wonderful new foods; the strange sights to be seen by recruits. Bat Jones, interpreting, seemed slow and sulky; and Jane more than once cast a sharp look at him.

"He's up the pole," Jimmy explained, "because Jane and I (I helped her), we've got the taste for drink right away from him. He says, if he lifts his elbow, he's taken as sick as a dog. He says, if he downs a pint, he feels he's dying. He says all the pleasure in life's been taken away. Jane, she's bonzer, but sometimes she does go a bit too far, and I've an idea she may have this time."

Lombard did not reply immediately. He had had a glorious day; natives had been induced to submit to head-measurements, to have their heights noted, their extraordinary chest-developments patted and clucked over. He'd even managed to have a question or two put about this matter of anthropophagy; was it ceremonial or dietetic? But the examinees, strange to say, had put the question by, anxiously demanding whether the white chiefs had brought salt?

Lombard, wishing to please, had assured them (always through the sulky Bat Jones) that there was plenty of trade salt with the party, and had gone so far as to help himself, in Jane's absence, from the carriers' packs.

"You should have seen them," he told her now. "Why, the very children snatched it and licked it up off their palms like sugar. I infer the stuff they get from down on the beach isn't as popular."

"Too right it isn't," said Jane, "not when they've got a feast coming on."

She had stopped talking; the rifle lay still across her knees; now and then her long, capable fingers lightly played with it. Lombard, obsessed by his own ideas and interests, did not observe, in the swift-falling dusk, that Jane had carelessly, as it were, slid back the safety catch. Jimmy-the-Rag had seen, but made no remark.

"This business," said Jane presently, "is all wrong to blazes."

LOMBARD said: "Yes?" He wasn't much interested in the recruiting, but one had to be polite.

"They're listening," Jane went on, "but they're not taking no heed of nothing I say. They're thinking of something else all the time."

Lombard said, "Yes?" He was watching, with interest, the curious effect produced, in the sudden dusk, by the white eyeballs and teeth of the little Lolok men, floating detached, just like (he thought) the grin of the Cheshire Cat. The brown naked men themselves were invisible now. And there were no women about.

"You didn't ought," said Jane, "to have gave them all that salt."

"But why?"

"It puts ideas," she stated, "into their heads."

"And when a wild native has an idea," Jimmy contributed, "it's apt to be a bad one."

Lombard was not a nervous man. "What's the idea this time?" he asked. "Cut off the party? Why? We've done nothing to them."

"No, we haven't done nothing. But look there."

She pointed to the empty place where, a minute earlier, Bat Jones' white face and more or less white shirt had been visible. "Bolted," she said. "I was looking for that! And I'll lay he has been talking mischief instead of interpreting proper, the snake-faced little swine!"

"Psychological experiments, one thinks," Lombard softly observed, "are best carried out by experts."

"I never put my leg across one," Jane briefly replied. "Horses good enough." But he was not at all sure she didn't understand him, all the same.

"The truth is," she said, "that they've gone snake-headed on us, somehow or other; and the sooner we get away, the better."



"We-fellow got plenty salt," he giggled.

Jimmy-the-Rag nodded. "It won't be nice going in the dark," he said, "but when you see them making cooking-pits six feet long—"

"Did you see that?" Lombard inquired. "I wasn't aware that it was a custom. It sounds very—"

"And that's the stuff they cook with," Jane interrupted, pointing to a bunch of green leaves, dimly visible in the leaping firelight.

"*Solanum anthropophagum*," Jimmy-the-Rag interpolated. ("One of these days I'll find out your history," Lombard thought.) He wasn't afraid, but he was certainly rather excited, and Jimmy's reference to the sinister herb of cannibal cookery sent prickles down his spine.

Jane was on her feet; she had slung the rifle into the crook of her arm; Jimmy-the-Rag was standing with a hand on the .45 in his belt. It was almost dark now; Lombard could feel the cool hilt of his own weapon, but he could not see it; he could not see anything except the shadows that were Jane and Jimmy, and the eerie floating eyes and teeth of the Lolok men. They seemed to be drawing back. They—what was that?

He hadn't been in the War—he was too young; but when Jimmy-the-Rag softly murmured, "Barrage," he understood. Over his head, and over the heads of Jane and Jimmy, had suddenly whistled a score of missiles, delivered by something that made an ugly whooping noise. "Slings!" he thought, and was for the moment torn between a professional desire to see how it was done, and a very human wish to get out of the way.

Of course, one could fire at random; but here, in the dark, in unknown country, with an unknown force advancing beneath the shelter of slung stones that made a nasty noise, it wouldn't do much good.

Jimmy-the-Rag thought so too, it seemed; for he said—as a sudden flare rose up from the cooking-pits, illuminating the bodies and wild faces of the little Lolok men: "Retreat cut off, seems to me."

Jane said nothing. Lombard asked Jimmy, who seemed to be in command, "What do we do?" and Jimmy, his eyes fixed on the closing ranks of the savages, said: "Nothing for the minute; these beggars change their minds about every ten seconds, and they don't know, just now, what they're going to do themselves."

"One thing they aren't going to do," Jane remarked, "is recruit and turn my overdraft upside down for me." She seemed a good deal more concerned over this, Lombard thought, than over any possible risk to their lives.

UNEXPECTEDLY, from the now halted ranks, came a voice speaking in pidgin English.

"Hallo," it said.

"Hello," Jane answered it promptly. "Who the mischief are you?"

The voice replied: "Me Pumpkin. Me been work along plantation white man."

"When?"

Pumpkin considered this, and replied: "Bee-fore."

"There was a boy they called Pumpkin," Jane said to Jimmy, "at Gagi-Gagi plantation, about three years ago. He looked like the chap who was doing the block in Samarai the other night."

Pumpkin said: "Yess-s. Me see you killem man. Hoo!" he added excitedly. "You big, bee-eg woman, this one big, beeg man. Killem finish, bee-hind you makem alive! Hoo!"

"He says," explained Jane, "me and Jimmy killed a man dead and brought him alive again just after. Too right, Pumpkin; that's just what we done!"

"You beeg woman, him beeg man," Pumpkin repeated. "Me tellem this fellow Lolok man, no good killem you, behind you jump up quick."

A murmur rose from the crowd. Somebody threw more wood on the cooking-fires; again the orange flames leaped up, and showed the moving mass of savages a little farther away. Pumpkin had spoken in rapid native to them; the

substance of his discourse was easily to be guessed, by the effect.

"You tell us, Pumpkin," Jane commanded, "what do they think we done on them; why won't they sign on?"

"Bat," replied the native. "Bat him talk plenty bad."

"That's not all of it. Spit it out," Jane urged him. "What else?"

Pumpkin giggled, pointed to Lombard. "Him give 'em plenty salt."

A gentle whistle escaped from Jimmy's lips. "Thrifty crowd, these beggars," he said. "Don't want to waste anything. Specially opportunities."

THERE was a moment's silence. In the bush the Marconi crickets, as they are called by island settlers, were beginning their nightly *trrt-tt, trr-tt*, longs, shorts, short-longs, miniature radio calls flying from tree to tree. The flying-foxes quarreling in the mangoes cursed like angry cats. Nobody spoke. The three white folks were well aware that their lives, in the next few minutes, might hang upon the caprice of men to whom reason and consecutive thinking were as little known as the propositions of Euclid. Among the Lokos—Jimmy knew, Lombard guessed—impulse was god.

Three firearms against three hundred slings and as many score fighting arrows, sharp and strong as those with which our ancestors won at Agincourt. . . . One could postpone the end, no more—if the trembling scale went down. . . .

Pumpkin unconsciously kicked it up. "Him say," he remarked (nothing was stranger, in the whole scene, than the casual way in which the issues of life and death were being handled), "Him say, him like plenty see you-fellow killem one man, make him get up again. All-a-same. Him say," (Pumpkin was getting warm now; the issue was personal), "him say Pumpkin blanky liar; me no like!"

Jane said briskly: "And if we do, what about this recruiting?"

"My word," declared Pumpkin, "I makem sign on quick."

"And if we don't?"

Pumpkin gave a nasty giggle. "We-fellow got plenty salt," he remarked.

Jane told the others: "I've got to get these boys. The bank said—never mind; they're a pack of Judases, promising one thing and— Look here, Mr. Lombard, a lot of this is due to you—oh, I know I'm in it too, but—you've got to be killed this time."

Lombard said: "What?"

"Laid out like Bat Jones was."

"But Jane—you can't simulate dead drunkenness—not at short notice, anyhow; and they wouldn't be taken in."

Jane was reaching for Lombard's precious medicine-case, without which he never traveled away from civilization. It had caused many complaints from the carriers on the way up; but now—

She had the chloroform bottle in her hand; she was uncorking it, and spilling the contents on a very grimy handkerchief. "Put him down," she ordered Jimmy. Lombard, inwardly protesting, hurriedly lay down upon the earth. It didn't seem to be an occasion for frivolous objections. All the same, this—He began to count, inwardly. Jane was pushing the anesthetic; he hoped she wouldn't—"Nineteen—tween—"

More and more wood was thrown upon the fires. The forest blazed. Dark faces, gliding in and out of the surrounding trees, stared at the inert figure on the ground. The whole ceremony had been gone through again. "You must," Jimmy explained, "or Pumpkin won't think it genuine." Lombard, dead to the world, lay with hands crossed and ankles bound. Torches were stuck in the ground beside him, white flowers from the bush (it happened to be wild garlic) strewn upon him. Pumpkin, greatly daring, had poked a burning brand against the corpse's bare arm, and pointed out to the assembled crowd, with the air of a showman, that the skin sizzled, but the corpse never moved.

A CHORUS of comments and remarks arose. Jane demanded translation; she rather thought she had caught a word she knew.

"Him say," the amiable Pumpkin translated, "suppose this fellow man no get up quick, get up good, him like to eat. Young feller, nice feller." He gave the sinister giggle of his kind, and added: "Plenty salt stop."

In the blazing firelight Jimmy-the-Rag saw that Jane had turned pale. She caught his glance. She hedged.

"If we don't get them boys," she said, "if anything goes wrong, I dunno how I'm ever going to pay for that third operation of Jack's; and if he don't have it, maybe he won't walk again, what they told me he might."

"You're very anxious," Jimmy said. "About—Jack."

Jane said suddenly, "Jack? No! I—I—" And stopped, with her hands before her face.

It was at that moment that Lombard elected to cut short a growing terror in the minds of Jimmy and of Jane (for after all, with anesthetics, accidents do happen) and to uncross his hands, and attempt to rise. A yell went up from the crowd. Lombard didn't hear it. He was feeling very sick; and he thought he had heard—or was it the chloroform?—an extraordinary statement, on the part of Jane, that might or might not ultimately concern himself.

Jimmy came forward with a knife, and ceremoniously cut his bonds. He rose, with the help of somebody's arm. A strong arm, but soft, like somebody—He couldn't think, just yet.

IT might have been Jane's. But now she was busy; she was, once more, addressing the crowd, with the help, this time, of the pidgin-speaking Pumpkin. Trade goods were passed from hand to hand. Young men were hustled out by the elders from the rear ranks of the throng, and handed over like so many parcels. They would go down; they would "sign on," and Jane would be a hundred or two richer by the transaction.

Camp was made that night. There was little sleep for anyone; drums beat; dogs howled; natives danced and sang from dark to dawn. Lombard was made happy, before they left, by the possession of a dozen or so of native slings, which (Jimmy assured him) would easily, any one of them, account for Goliath, if a David was on the spot.

Little was said on the way back. When they reached the shore, and found the cutter waiting, in charge of a somewhat anxious crew, Jane, before she leaped, light as a deer, across the bow, remarked to the world at large:

"There's maybe something to be said for leaving their sins to people."

Lombard encouragingly said: "Yes?"

"Because," Jane elaborated, "there's some of them blighters, which, if you take their sins away from them, there isn't enough of them left to hold their guts together."

"Tomlinson," softly observed the disreputable looking Jimmy-the-Rag.

"Don't know the name," Jane answered, throwing a shapely leg into the boat. But Lombard, who remembered his Kipling, silently laughed.

Illustrated
by
Jeremy
Cannon



The Little

This fifteenth story of the "Warriors in Exile" series deals with the strange events of a Foreign Legion expedition in the Sudan.

IN St. Malo, that curious little walled town of the corsairs, the same to-day as when its rovers coursed the sea, you may see the towering, elegant houses built by the "armorers" or ship-outfitters, from their huge profits—houses all alike, huddled side by side within the circuit of the walls, identical from foundation to chimneypots.

From one of those houses I watched a funeral procession depart. Everybody was afoot, naturally, except the chief *dramatis persona*; and from those standing around I inquired the name of the defunct.

"Doctor Bisterтт," some one told me. An odd name, I thought, and went my way.

Some months later, returning to St. Malo, I went to the sister-town of St. Servien one afternoon—five minutes, by tram. Here, tucked away in a twisting side-street, was a queer dingy shop holding everything from beautiful rapiers to Chinese books or brass pivoted handguns off old corsairs. The proprietor was a small grayish man, very amiable,

very brisk and fond of a drink. I shall call him Charles.

Among other things, he showed me a jewel-box of carved dark wood, quite a handsome piece, and cheap. I bought it, and inquired whence it had come.

"I got it at a sale at St. Malo," he said. "The effects of an old surgeon were for auction on the sand under the walls. Here's another thing from his effects."

He showed me a small black fetich-figure of Sudanese work, very old and fine, but of such a nature that the customs would have confiscated it had I tried to bring the thing into America as it now was. However, the tiny figure had an instant fascination for me. The expression on the black carven features was diabolic; it had the charm of the ultra-horrific. I determined to buy it and, at least, take the torso home with me.

"How on earth would a doctor get hold of such a thing?" I asked idly.

"Oh!" exclaimed Charles. "Dr. von Bisterтт was in the Foreign Legion, m'sieur. He got this in the Sudan. He



"Then you are going to find out," said Bisterтт. "Now!"

Black God

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

was there, with the mounted company of the Legion. Often he has told me about it—you see, we were old friends. He buried my brother there."

Charles was just a trifle diffident, even after we repaired to the corner café. He hesitated to talk freely about Bisterтт, and one drink followed another. . . . I touched on other matters. St. Malo is proud of its greatest son, Chateaubriand, who lies buried on one of the rocks jutting from the harbor, so we talked of Chateaubriand. I told Charles about an American restaurant which spells the name Chateau Briant, and he wiped his eyes with his laughter.

Presently he came back to Bisterтт of his own accord.

"It is a horrible sort of story in its way," he said; "yet one gathers that you will comprehend much that cannot be said."

Having got this typically French sentence off his chest, he became more lucid. Bisterтт, it appeared, had become a surgeon in Vienna, got into some kind of mess, disappeared, and enlisted in the

Legion as a private, not letting out a peep about being a medico.

Charles then told me about his brother, another chap who made a mess of things and joined up with the Legion under the name of Lang. When, late in 1892, a company of four officers and one hundred and twenty men was picked from both regiments of the Legion for service in the Sudan, the two men were flung together and they speedily became friends.

Lang was a young fellow, while Bisterтт was in his twenties, a quiet, retiring, laconic type of man, quite different from the fiery, impetuous Lang.

ONCE in headquarters at Kayes, the Legionnaires were divided into flying columns aiding larger units in pursuit of Sultan Samory's brigands—"Sofas," as they were termed. The service was one of intelligence, of brush fighting, of guerilla warfare. But at Kayes was a girl, the daughter of a Spanish half-caste trader; and the two friends would have to fall in love with Lola, of course.

In some ways she was a gorgeous thing, free, unmoral, with no inhibitions, and just close enough to the negro race to be imbued with all their superstitions. Her father was a furtive, greedy, fawning fellow, no good whatever. Whether she was any good or not, herself, she certainly possessed a flame of vivid beauty and an imperious will which brooked no obstacles. All who knew her were her slaves, from her father to the Legion; and most of them were glad to be her slaves.

One would naturally suppose that the cynical eye of Bisterdt would shy from such an affair, and the more ardent Lang would be an easy victim. Real life, however, does not always correspond to theory. Lang had money in his pocket, and for a week was desperately and violently in love.

BUT when a detachment of fifty men and two officers set off after a band of Sofas who were pillaging and burning, Lang had recovered from his mooning and was his usual brisk, impetuous self. It was Bisterdt who carried a lock-et with a tiny picture under his shirt, and was more laconic, more wary, than ever. Lang read the symptoms aright.

"You'd better lay off that girl," he told Bisterdt one night. "Just as one comrade to another."

The Austrian eyed him coldly. "Yes? You'd like to have me out of the way, eh?"

Lang shrugged. "I've had my lesson in that quarter. You can always see through a smoked glass if the smoke's rubbed off. Besides, I've picked up a few things. We're not the first troops to be in these parts, you know."

"What are you insinuating?" demanded Bisterdt in chill fury. Lang met his gaze a moment, then turned away.

"Nothing," he said. "Except that rumors go around. Not true, perhaps."

"Correct," said Bisterdt. "I tell you Lola is a rose in a dung-heap, and deserves to be better placed in life!"

"There's no argument," conceded Lang, who wanted no feud on his hands. "Forget it." But between them came a coolness; they were no longer inseparable friends. . . .

The pursuit ended in nothing, except two or three men hit, a few sick. They rode back to headquarters, and prepared to go out with the Archinard column. And there Lola had a furious scene with Lang.

He had avoided her pointedly, but she cornered him. Now, a Frenchman such as Lang was, despite his borrowed name, almost intuitively sees through this type of woman. He may get his fingers burned, but if his pocketbook is burned as well, it reaches his heart on the instant. A Bréton has eyes in his wallet, as the saying goes.

Charming as the girl was, excellent actress as she was, Lang was clear of the net and said as much.

"You and your precious father got my money," he stated calmly. "That, my dear, is your game; you worked it on that lieutenant of tirailleurs three months ago, and you've worked it on others. I'm not complaining; but I'm not coming back, either."

To his real surprise, she broke into tears. She possessed that singular youthful freshness, that engaging charm, which the French call beauty of the devil. Like many of mixed blood, she had a fleshly shell of unutterable loveliness. Any but a Frenchman and a Bréton would have been instantly melted by her tears and her protestations of love, which sounded sincere enough. Any other man would have bartered his soul for an hour's love of such beauty. But not Lang.

"I don't believe a word of it," he said, though he did rather believe her. "Love me? Bah! You're no such fool. If you'd talked that way before I got my lesson—well, who knows? Too late now, My money's gone, and I'm gone."

She caught his hand and kissed it. Then, her eyes suffused with tears, she looked up at him.

"I can't blame you," she said brokenly. "But you're going back into the jungle, into danger. Will you accept a gift from me, a charm to ward off peril?"

Lang, being young, had begun to regret his own firmness, and was cursing himself for being cruel to her. He smiled a little and thought if this trifle would please the girl, well and good.

"With all my heart! But I don't hold much with religious charms—"

"Oh, this is a native charm!" she said quickly. "It has brought great good luck to my father, always. It was given him by the greatest witch-doctor on the upper Niger, and is centuries old. I'll steal it from him and give it to you—will you meet me tonight outside the barracks?"

Lang said yes to this, and parted from her in relief.

THAT evening he found Bisterтт in savage humor. The queerest elements of human nature come to the surface when a soldier is far away from civilization in some dark corner of the world. This Austrian, with his background, would by all the rules be the last man to yield to superstition; yet now he gave Lang a deep, uneasy look, and spoke his mind.

"Bad luck ahead," he said in his jerky way. "Antonio says so."

"Antonio? Lola's father, eh? Better steer clear of that rascal," Lang advised. "I know he's hand in glove with Samory's agents. Headquarters have an eye on him. He's thick with every damned witch-doctor in the country, too."

"Precisely the point." And Bisterтт sneered. "He says they all say the same thing—many dead on this coming expedition. He says Weber, the surgeon, won't come back. He says you'll stop a bullet. In fact, he's offered me a fetich charm of his own to carry; he says it's very old and of great power. I'm going to see him tonight, and get it."

Lang grinned to himself. He had no faith whatever in any of the African witch-doctors or fetich-workers. He had no faith in anything, for that matter, being at the wrong age to entertain much faith. So Lola was giving him her father's charm, and her father had offered it to Bisterтт! Well, he would be the one to get it first, if Lola kept her word.

"What's this fetich charm like?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Bisterтт. "Antonio has them by the score. He believes firmly in the things."

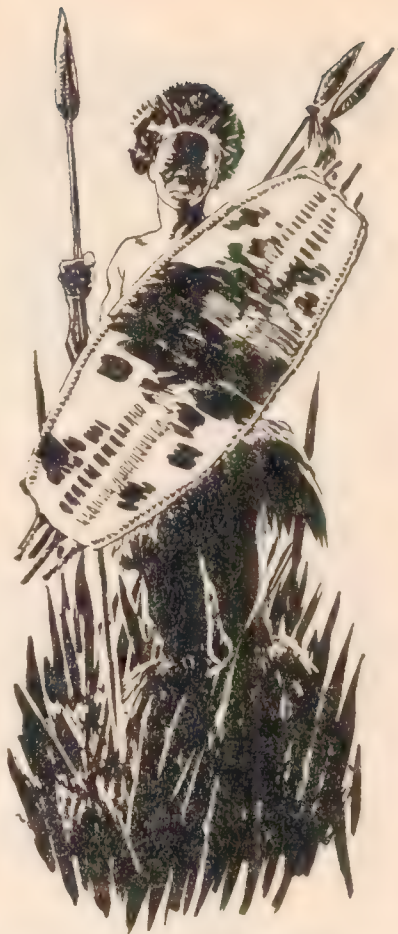
Lang chuckled again, but not outwardly. Behind the Austrian's manner he sensed a restraint, an angry agitation, and he wanted no trouble on his hands.

"Come," he said soberly, "don't worry about me, Bisterтт. I'm cured of love, and so far as I'm concerned, you'll have a clear field with Lola. My word and my hand on it!"

"You mean that?" The other's eyes cleared, as he took Lang's hand.

"Faith of a Legionnaire!" exclaimed Lang; and they shook on it.

An hour later Lang went out to his meeting with Lola. It was not prolonged. She shook with sobs, to his distaste, and pressed a little package upon him.



"Guard it always!" she said brokenly. "My father is giving another to your friend the Austrian tonight. This is his chief treasure, and I stole it for your sake. Keep it, and you'll have luck."

He parted from her as quickly as possible; but to his annoyance, a passing corporal saw them there together, and was not slow to pass word around, which eventually got to the ears of Bisterтт. Not immediately, however.

LANG put the little packet away among his possessions and forgot about it, save when he was packing or unpacking. To this detachment of the Legion, it was a lark to be mounted, to have a *bat* or a pack-mule to every two men; they cheerfully accepted all other privations, for the sake of this blessing, and covered ground like the devil himself.

They were off two days later on a fighting scout ahead of the column; and on the march Lang found Bisterтт definitely hostile. He had heard of that meeting at night, an hour after Lang swore he had nothing more to do with Lola, and he was furious.

"Your word's worth nothing!" he snapped. "Listen to you? I will not.



"My friend, Lola didn't give you that fetich for any good," Bistertt told Lang.

Keep your distance and speak to me only when you must."

Lang shrugged, and let the matter rest; he was only too glad it had not come to blows. Besides, he had troubles of his own.

Everything went wrong with him. His horse fell lame; a bullet damaged his canteen and it could not be well patched; his left eye caught a slight infection, and Surgeon Weber clapped a bandage over it; black marks began to blemish his record; and worst of all, his rifle developed trouble at the wrong times. Cleaning it, he discharged it when he

could have sworn no cartridge was in it, and barely missed blowing his own foot off; as it was, his leg was badly powder-scorched.

Then they cornered the Sofas, cut them up, and the scrimmage was a hot one while it lasted. In the midst of it Andrews, an Englishman, was badly hit. Lang and Bistertt got him back to where the surgeon was at work.

"Not worth the trouble," said Bistertt. "His lung's punctured, and—"

He went on to tell in medical parlance just what was wrong with Andrews; and his words were true enough, for Andrews gasped and died before he finished speaking. Weber gaped at him.

"Eh? How do you know so much, Bistertt? Only a surgeon could—"

There was a *clump* and the surgeon toppled over with a bullet through his head.

An officer had heard the conversation, and he turned to Bistertt.

"You've been a surgeon? Then drop your rifle and get to work. You'll rank as surgeon the rest of the trip."

Bistertt obtained permanent rank as surgeon, in fact, and was an excellent one. It was typical of the Legion of that day, when the corps could produce anything from a prince to an artist, at a moment's notice.

Before the scrimmage was over, Lang stopped a bullet; a mere flesh-wound in his arm.

"You see? Antonio's prediction was a true one," said Bistertt, as he bandaged the hurt. "You're lucky, at that, Not even a sling necessary."

WEEKS of pursuit, of hard marching, of occasional sniping and savage encounter, but nothing worthy of the Legion. Still everything went wrong with Lang, until it began to be whispered that he was under a fetich curse. One night in camp he came across Lola's packet, and opened it up.

He found a hideous little black wooden god, with a face so fiendish, so unspeakably malign, that it was fascinating. The savage workmanship was magnificent. The little figure was obscene; but wrapped about it like a doll's cloak was a fragment of khaki uniform cloth, dotted with knots of wool, cowrie shells and beads. Lang stared at it, frowned, remembered that Lola had once begged him for the tattered remnants of a uniform blouse; then he tossed the whole thing aside with a careless laugh.

He kept it, however. The hideous little god was attractive in its way.

A detachment of Hausas under a French officer, a gay blade recently out from home, joined the column to replace a convoy of sick and wounded who were sent back. Some days later a spy brought in word that Ali Segor, one of the Sofa leaders, was in a village a few miles away, with a dozen of his men. Instantly the Hausas and a dozen of the mounted Legion were sent out to round him up. Lang and Bisterth were among the dozen.

LANG had changed, during these weeks. His laughing gayety had deserted him; his cheeks had fallen in; his eyes were sunken; he looked twenty years older. There was nothing wrong that could be determined. An occasional touch of fever, but not enough to send him to hospital; yet the change was so marked that new murmurs arose among his comrades. Fetich work, they said. They had absorbed so much fetich talk that they were coming to believe in it.

They looked upon him as a doomed man. In this, they were encouraged by the blacks. How the talk started, no one knew; but the blacks avoided Lang like the plague.

The little force struck the village, caught Ali Segor napping, killed the Arab half-caste and some of his men, captured others, and counted losses. The young French officer of Hausas had a bullet through his ribs, not dangerously; and Lang, with his accustomed ill luck, was ignobly kicked by a mule, which made him vomit blood but did no outward damage. He was waiting to be examined by Bisterth while the latter bandaged the young officer's wound, and he saw what transpired.

As the officer's chest was bared, Bisterth stood frozen, staring at a locket and chain that was disclosed. The officer laughed.

"That? Oh, that's a gage of love, *mon vieux!* A girl back at headquarters. There—look at her picture! *Diable!* The thing cost me a thousand francs, one way or another; but she was worth it, I assure you."

He related a few details of his light love-affair with Lola. Bisterth listened, cold and still, then made a gesture and fell to work at the wound.

Afterward, Bisterth came and sat down beside Lang, lit a pipe, and after a moment asked:

"You heard? Of course. I don't blame you for going back on your pledged word to me, comrade; any man would go crazy for love of her. I would myself—but not any more."

"It's high time you were ready to talk of it," retorted Lang. "My word wasn't broken, Bisterth. Listen, if you want to hear how it happened—"

He told about having seen Lola outside the barracks, for a scant ten minutes. The Austrian heard him out, and nodded again.

"I see. I owe you the deepest apologies; I make them here and now."

"Nonsense!" Lang pressed his hand. "Forget it. We're comrades."

"What was the thing she gave you?"

Lang told about the little black god. Bisterth shook his head gravely.

"My friend, she hated you bitterly. Antonio hated you too. I'm glad you told me all this; now I'm sure of her duplicity. Oh, I've been silent, but I've thought a few things! And my eyes have been opened! Lola hated you because you would not come back to her. And she didn't give you that fetich for any good."

Lang smiled up at him. "Come! You don't swallow this fetich talk—you of all men?"

"I, of all men, would find something in it," Bisterth replied slowly. "I've looked into it, and there are things I can't explain or understand. Magic? As a scientist, I laugh at the idea. But primitive peoples have strange powers, my dear Lang. . . . Look here—there's a fetich priest in this village. Suppose I get him to look at your black god tonight, eh?"

Lang laughed assent.

He still laughed when, that night, the old black bag-of-bones admitted them to his foul-smelling hut, with an interpreter. Lang did not, could not, take all this mumbo-jumbo seriously. He was, however, deliriously happy that everything was cleared away between him and Bisterth, that the two of them were friends once more. This, to him, was the all-important thing.

THAT day the withered witch-doctor had seen the dreaded Ali Segor killed, his whole band killed or captured by these French, the new masters of the land. He had seen all the village fetiches overthrown, burned or destroyed. He was not only in terror, but he was cunningly ready to build for the future. Hence, he was amiable.

When the hideous little black god was disclosed, however, he very literally threw a fit. When Lang handled it contemptuously and spat upon it to polish the old dark wood a bit, the witch-doctor shivered, and stretched out a skinny claw and gabbled hastily. The interpreter turned a frightened face to the two white men.

"He says it is an image of the great snake god, Dambala. Some one who meant you harm has given it to you. This is a piece of khaki uniform wrapped around it, in which are sewn evil charms. Dambala will destroy the man who owned this piece of cloth, unless it is first destroyed and the god appeased."

Lang laughed at this, but Bisterdt did not laugh. Looking grave, he spoke.

"Tell him to appease the god; I will pay what it costs. Tell him to destroy the piece of cloth."

The interpreter exchanged hasty words with the fetich priest, then translated.

"He says you must give him the image of the god."

"I will not," said Bisterdt. "Tell him to do as I command."

An hour later, after witnessing an alleged magic ceremony that left them both unnerved, the two comrades departed. Bisterdt carried the little black image.

"Here's your evil god or devil, if you want it back."

"Bah! Keep it, if it appeals to you," said Lang, and shivered. "I've lost interest."

"I don't blame you." The Austrian was very serious. "My friend, she gave it to you; she had that charm made; from that moment, you've had the worst run of luck I ever saw! And you tell me there's nothing in this fetich business?"

LANG shivered again. "Devil take all of it! I've a touch of fever; get me a dose of quinine, before we turn in. And my side hurts like hell. Blast that mule!"

"Blast that accursed woman, rather!" said Bisterdt in a low grim voice. "All you said of her was true, and I jeered at your warning. Well, comrade, I apologize again! And if anything happens to you—well, she'll answer for it."

"Don't be a fool," Lang rejoined. "A run of bad luck, sure; nothing else."

"Not at all sure," Bisterdt said darkly. "Come along and get your dose."

Lang put down the quinine, and then managed a ghastly grin.

"If there were anything in your fetich theory," he said, "I'd have felt relief and gay spirits the instant that piece of cloth was burned! But I don't. I feel like the devil. Good night, my friend—it's good to be at one with you again!"

WHEN they came to turn him out in the morning, Lang was dead. There was a blue mark under his ribs where the mule had kicked him. With a start of recollection, Bisterdt got out the little wooden image of the god and looked at the spot Lang had rubbed the night before. Sure enough, it was in the identical place of that blue mark—a spot in the wood.

With a curse, the Austrian put the little ugly image away, carefully.

He was a man who took things hard; a cynical, deadly sort of man, this Austrian. He could be cold and chill; he was a man of few words; he made an ideal surgeon, for he seemed to have no human sensibilities. This was a delusion, for still waters run deep, and he was very deep. This death of Lang horrified him to the bottom of his soul, and the cause of it.

That is, what he took to be the cause of it. He was earnest in his belief that the fetich people had something unseen but terrible behind them. The scientific brain in its ceaseless search for primal causes is the most gullible on earth, or the most cynical. On the premise that he has dissected a thousand brains and never discovered a soul, one surgeon may cynically deny the existence of a soul; while another will therefrom deduce a deeply mystic faith in the unseen and the unknown. Bisterdt was of the latter type, in regard to fetich powers.

He actually believed that the bit of khaki cloth with its charms had been destroyed too late; that it had killed Lang; and that these fetich powers had been invoked by Lola for just such a purpose. This became a deep conviction, an obsession, with him. His eyes became more cold and bitter than ever.

All the while, the column was hard on the move.

Bisterdt no longer wore the locket with the picture of Lola. . . .

When the various detachments came together for the return, having marched three thousand kilometers and fought fourteen real encounters, without having put the Sofas out of business—when they came together, Bisterdt received a letter from Captain Soutain. It was a letter



"Guard it always,"
she said brokenly.
"I stole it for your
sake."

Lang had given the Captain, to be delivered in case of his death:

I want you to know the truth about the woman who has bewitched you. Once we were friends, dear friends; if you receive these words, it will be after my death. I feel in my heart that I shall not return from this campaign. Because I love you, I leave you this legacy of the truth about Lola, as I have learned it. Rather, I should say, about her father. She is not so bad; it is Antonio who is evil. He is a spy for Sultan Samory, for the Soja leaders. Nobody would believe this, just as you will believe nothing amiss about Lola herself—

Bisterтт read the accusations. They were deadly. No legal proofs, of course; nothing headquarters could act upon. But as Bisterтт read, his eyes were opened. Now he knew why Lang had been given that devil-god with the evil charms, why he had been marked out for death.

Antonio and his daughter had learned that Lang was getting this information about them.

Bisterтт said nothing at all. He tore up the letter and burned the scraps of paper. But he sat long over his pipe that night, brooding, and the expression in his face was not unlike the expression



The interpreter translated: "He says you must give him the image of the god." "I will not," said Bisteritt. "Tell him to do as I command."

on the face of the little black wooden image. A letter from a dead man—"because I love you." Well, there are hurts and regrets and savage thoughts too deep for words.

The weary column tramped into Kayes on May 3, 1893. Within the hour, word went around that the detachment of the Legion was homeward bound, that a ship would arrive at once. The mounted lark was all over.

That evening, still in his stained, tattered service uniform, revolver at hip, khaki-covered topee nicked by bullets and faded by sun, Bisteritt came to the house of Antonio, adjoining the trader's store. There was a dance going on in town that night, and Lola was attending it with the young officer of Hausas, as Bisteritt well knew; he had come, however, to see Antonio.

The furtive, swarthy half-caste received him warmly, with great cordiality. The Austrian refused the proffered drinks, however.

"I have a present for you," he said, touching the package under his arm. "But not here; too many eyes around, Antonio. Can we go to the back room of your shop, where no one will see us? This is something very important."

"Of course, of course!" And with a leer the trader took up a lantern and lit it. "Come along. A little matter of loot, eh? I hear the troops brought back quantities."

"Correct," said Bisteritt laconically.

He followed Antonio across the compound to the rear of the shop and warehouse, where the trader had a strongly built room that was thief-proof. They went in. The air was hot and musty, and a moth who had followed the light buzzed and flittered around the lantern on the desk. Antonio settled down, lit a cigar, and nodded.

"All safe. What have you?"

"Something extraordinary," said Bisteritt. "It cost me a bit of money, too. Do you remember that some little time ago you gave one of your shirts to that fellow who works for you—a red shirt?"

Antonio laughed heartily, though in some surprise.

"Yes, of course! Poor Bojo has coveted that red shirt a long time. Well?"

With a shrug, Bisteritt extended the package.

Antonio opened it with eager curiosity. A queer expression came into his face when thin red cloth came into sight, dotted with cowrie shells and knots of

wool. His swarthy hue became an ashen gray when he saw it was wrapped about the black god Dambala. His eyes lifted in stabbing ecstasy of fear.

"*What*—" He swallowed hard on the word, tried again. "What is it?"

"So you recognize the procedure, eh?" Bisterтт said grimly. "That's the thing I wanted to know. The snake-god is an old friend of yours, eh?"

"I—this—this is terrible!" quavered Antonio, flabby lines coming in his face as horror dilated his eyes. "You—you don't know what this means! Who gave it to you?"

"A friend of mine sent it to you," said Bisterтт slowly. "Lang."

Antonio started at the word.

"No, no!" he declared with shrill emphasis. "He is dead. I saw his name on the list. I know he is dead!"

"You took good care he'd be dead," Bisterтт rejoined coldly. "You had Lola give him this image of Dambala. You had it marked on the side by the fetich priest."

Antonio shrank back. "I—she—it was all a joke," he faltered. Then, with an effort, he drew himself up. "This is all nonsense. I am a good Christian. I have nothing to do with this fetich palaver. Only ignorant blacks believe in such things."

The Austrian grinned, without any amusement or humor.

"You gave me a charm that brought luck, anyhow. . . . Antonio, you're a damned liar. Lang had found out too much about your dealings with Sultan Samory. That's why you killed him with this damned thing."

"I know nothing about it, I tell you!" Antonio cried, sweat coursing down his jowl.

"Then," Bisterтт said calmly, "you're going to find out—*now*."

In that solidly built, confined room, the sound of the shot was muffled. It drew no attention from the world outside.

DURING the following morning Bisterтт was hard at work on various papers which had to be drawn up, looking to his permanent appointment as surgeon. In the midst, one of his closest comrades came bursting into the room.

"Bisterтт! Do you know what's happened? Name of the devil! That trader Antonio, you know him? Found with a

bullet through his head. And in his hand a chain and locket with the picture of Lola—*mon Dieu!* And they say Lola has skipped out. And that young Hausa officer who's been sparking her, the one who was with us on the march—he has just shot himself in barracks!"

"Indeed?" said Bisterтт coldly. "Best thing he could do, I fancy. That girl was no good."

"But I—we thought—you were in love with her—"

"Bah! As soon be in love with that thing." And Bisterтт pointed to the little black image of the snake-god, holding down some papers.

The other turned, and crossed himself as he opened the door.

"You'd better burn that damned thing," he flung hastily over his shoulder at the Austrian, "before you get to looking too much like him."

When Bisterтт, years later, received his discharge, he came to St. Malo and settled down there; but he had not burned the little black god. He lived alone, cold and sardonic as ever; and the Brétons crossed themselves when he went down or up the crooked streets, with talk of the evil eye.

And he died alone, with no one to mourn him except a few friends from Legion days, and those who respected his austere nature.

"**O**F which," I said to Charles, "you were one."

He nodded thoughtfully. The charm of his story had departed; we sat again in the café at the corner, fingering our drinks. I looked at the little black god, which I had brought along, and my eye was caught by a distinct splotch on one side, under the carven ribs.

"Here," I said, thrusting it at him, "take the damned thing. I don't want it, after all."

"I knew you would not, m'sieur," he said. "But I had to be honest about it, and tell you the story. After all, you know, Lang was my brother."

And now I remembered that I had seen him tramping along after the black-plumed hearse of Bisterтт, that day of the funeral. And noting his reverent touch as he folded a paper about the little black god, noting the queer look in his face, I wondered if he, like the Austrian, believed that fetich palaver.

Almost did I believe it, myself.

"Reilly of the Legion," curious story of the French conquest of Madagascar, will be a feature of our next issue.

Pigeon



Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

LUCAS DE REGLA, of the jewels-room, Meldon Memorial, looked up sharply, his eye caught by a vague movement ahead. The train was in motion among jewels—emeralds and rubies suspended on the black lace of signal-towers, yellow diamonds flung from invisible masts against smoky velvet, a string of pearl windows draped along a Stockton boat. The velvet was

San Francisco Bay. He did not see any of this; but he saw the movement.

"A museum man learns to see all he can at first sight," he used to say. "What he doesn't see is the adventure that follows. Museums are only concentrated adventures. An exhibit without adventure behind it would have no interest."

A porter from another car, paging some one down the aisle, had been followed through the vestibule by a Hindu nearly as dark of skin, and with his head bound in a turban.

"Mr. De Regla! Mr. De Regla!" droned the porter.

De Regla looked at his watch. This was probably another urgent telegram from Fairbody. The first had reached him in Portland. Fairbody had asked him to appraise some important rubies, offering in payment a museum piece consisting of one of the largest lumps of matrix gold ever mined. De Regla had promptly replied, naming this as his train, and the St. Nazaire as his San Francisco hotel. Fairbody was the Fairbody of the new gold-fields.

"Here you are, porter," said De Regla, taking the telegram.

The message struck him with something of a shock. It had been filed in San Francisco and read as follows:

FAIRBODY MURDERED. CONFIDENTIAL. ASK
CONFERENCE WHITETHORN HOTEL, INSTANT
YOU ARRIVE FROM FERRY.

HAVERRHILL, FOR POLICE.

As De Regla sat fingering the message, he noticed a further movement forward. The Hindu in the turban had stood uncertainly in the aisle until the message was claimed; then, turning completely around, he had plumped himself down on a seat with his back to the engine. De Regla now noticed a raising of the

Blood

The gifted author of "The Fire Flingers" and other noted books is at his best in this unusual detective story.

By
**WILLIAM
NEIDIG**

turbaned head. He would have sworn that the Hindu was watching him.

Nonsense, of course. De Regla's presence on this train could not have been widely known. Fairbody had known of it. The police apparently knew of it. What had this Hindu in a turban to do with either?

Nevertheless his feeling persisted; nonsense or not, he felt that the Hindu was watching him. Not openly, but covertly. Rubies out of India, Fairbody had said.

He folded the telegram, took up a monograph on the spinels, pretended to read. After a while he laid it aside and again glanced over the car. He did not let himself appear to look at the Hindu, but his eyes brought him a sharp picture of the man.

He began with the turban he was wearing—and instantly rubies out of India failed to make sense. De Regla knew very well that customs and manners change, in India as elsewhere. He knew also that few Western men, even after repeated visits, could hope to read the unwritten languages of the East. One of these was the language of the turban. So many folds, placed so and so, indicated such and such a race, tribe, profession, caste.

Customs and manners may change, but they do not die out. He doubted that a Hindu, if he wore a turban at all, would deliberately depart from Hindu traditions. Yet that is what this Hindu seemed to have done. He had given his turban sash the *amamah* winding, so as to tack from above his forehead, instead of the *pagri*, from above his ears.

The man's appearance in other respects seemed subtly wrong. He seemed to be wearing cowhide shoes; he seemed not to have shaved his head. Millions



"Put down that gun, Namorski!"

of Hindus do not; but if the back of his neck did not lie, he had reddish brown hair.

Whatever he was, he seemed to be watching De Regla.

The telegram decided the museum man. Gathering up his monograph, he rose and walked through the train to the club-car, found an envelope at the writing-desk, turned back—in time, by the breadth of a hair, to see the turban disappear into a smoking-room in the next car.

On reaching his own section, he went so far as to dredge a pistol from his bag, and slip it into his right hand coat pocket, merely to have it within reach.

THE remainder of the journey belonged to his porter; as the train approached the Mole, the museum man fell into line in the aisle. When it came to a stop he climbed down, hunted out his bag on the platform, sought the ferry concourse with his fellows; the bridge was not yet open.

It was the chance of a museum adventure he had had in the East that led him again to the Hindu. The adventure had consisted of an attempt to identify a swindler. It had failed, but he had come from it with a head filled with pictures from a Chicago police line-up.

One of these suddenly materialized out of nowhere:

A big fellow came from the direction of the local tracks—he was tall, square-shouldered, carefully dressed, and had features so oddly flattened that anybody seeing him once would remember him forever. The man had been pointed



"I've found it never pays to slam a door unless you have in your pocket the key that will open it."

out to him by the police as a crook named Namorski, sometimes known as the Count. Later he made the first pages in the newspapers. On the Coast no civilian gave him a second glance. In Chicago every other man on the street would have turned to stare at him.

Indeed in Chicago he would not have shown himself on the street; for besides having an Illinois police record, he had been sent to Michigan City for an Indiana killing, and had escaped from the penitentiary by aiding in another.

"Namorski!" murmured De Regla. "Well!"

Namorski was not a jewel-thief, although he had acted at one time as a jeweler's clerk. His presence here could have nothing to do with the Fairbody murder, nor with De Regla's presence. Nevertheless De Regla decided to see if he was alone. The man had a suitcase with him.

He saw very soon, in a pocket mirror, while picking a cinder from his eye. Namorski entered the room with his suitcase and sought the least conspicuous place in the room, namely against the rear wall, to await the raising of the

gate. As he stood there, the Hindu came up and spoke to him. . . . After that De Regla felt two pairs of eyes observing him, instead of but one.

Edging forward through the crowd, De Regla awaited the gate. He crossed the gangplank crisply, without lagging and without haste. On reaching the boat he descended at once to the lower deck.

He wished to smoke; he wished to think; he wished to remember as much as he could about Namorski, for the police, when he saw Haverhill. Presently he sank against the good oak wood of a seat at one side, and broke out a cigar.

The facts that seemed to stand out through the blue smoke, were:

One: The Hindu had known what train to take.

Two: He had known what man to expect.

Three: He had known why De Regla was expected.

Four: He had seen De Regla receive a telegram.

Five: Possibly he knew of the Fairbody murder.

Six: Since seeing the telegram delivered, he had become interested in De Regla's immediate movements.

Seven: His Hindu status was questionable.

Eight: He had as a partner an escaped convict and killer.

Nine: The pair were on some errand somehow connected with De Regla's movements.

Ten: They ought to be trailed by a good man—and this man must not be De Regla.

"Some of it is true; most of it, I think. But I can't prove it. All I can prove is that the Hindu is now seated upstairs on this boat, talking to Count Namorski, an escaped convict," he thought.

He could not prove even that. Had he looked behind him, he would have seen that Namorski, suitcase and all, had likewise taken his place among the half-lights downstairs.

DE REGLA sat smoking, his thoughts now on the Hindu, now on the murder, while his glance fell idly upon the other passengers in this part of the deck. One of these was a man of perhaps thirty years. He was clad in brown serge, of a quality subdued by long use. He had not come to this deck because of any bundle he carried. Neither had he sought its freedom in order to smoke. De Regla would have appraised him as a draftsman, except for his fingers; they were those of a mechanic.

It was not, however, the scarred fingers that engaged De Regla's interest; it was the fact that the man had come on board with every pocket in his clothing, inside and out, filled with rocks. The white faces of them peered from under the flaps of his coat pockets. Their sharp

elbows prodded the smoothest surfaces into peaks, or raised them into shapeless welts and swellings. The weight of them pulled downward upon every seam.

Whatever else he might be, the man was no gambler, able to hide his feelings. De Regla caught the tension in his face. The perception changed the direction of his thoughts.

"Why not?" he asked himself.

A TREMOR ran through the boat as the great wheels began churning at the water of the slip. The lights of the Mole began moving. A whistle crashed overhead. Somewhere in the distance an answering whistle boomed hoarsely.

After a little the man who was no gambler rose to his feet, very white, and passed through the door to the open deck behind. De Regla had known he would do this. He did not wait, but followed him out; when he saw the man standing at the rail, he too crossed to the rail.

"Clear tonight," he remarked, pulling upon his cigar.

The other made no reply.

They were standing in the stern of the boat, protected by its bulk from the cold tradewind sweeping inland across the peninsula opposite. The waves in San Francisco Bay are never high. Tonight the water seemed almost smooth. A poet might have said that the lights in the distance were stars, come down to rest their wings.

"Don't do it," remarked De Regla gently.

"Don't do what?" The other seemed to reply against his will.

"I've found it never pays to slam a door unless you have in your pocket the key that will open it."

"I have a key."

"No. You've weighted your pockets with stones. You'd sink like lead. What if you changed your mind at the last, when you tasted the sourness of that water? What key have you that would open a door as thick as that?"

"If I change my mind—I'll slip off my coat and swim for it. But I sha'n't."

De Regla smoked for a moment before he went on:

"You're forgetting the mud bottom, and you're forgetting the water-pressure. You couldn't free yourself. . . . That isn't what I started to say. If you want to climb over the rail and jump, who am I to stop you? You have no family. You're as free as I am. Your life belongs to you alone."

"Who are you?" asked the other.

"I see—you do have a family. In that case why not put off this thing until tomorrow? Why the rush?"

"I'd lose another day. I've already put it off."

"But your family would gain."

"Gain what?"

"The money you would leave them. The difference between the money in your pocket and the amount you would have earned."

"Money? I have no money. I can earn them no money."

"On the contrary, you could earn them a night's wages. I'm needing help for a few hours."

"How much?"

"Twenty-five dollars, if you can qualify."

"Doing what?"

"Are you used to pistols?"

"No good. I'm down, I admit, but not that far down. No stick-ups. I'm not your man."

DE REGLA flicked away his butt and found a fresh cigar, struck a match, touched it to the tobacco.

"This isn't a stick-up job. What's your business?"

"Machinist by trade, engineer by profession."

"What I had in mind was this: I have a piece of dangerous work to do, that may cost a life. What I really need is a skilled detective who would know how to protect himself. The trouble is, I need him now. The delay of half an hour would be fatal. You might qualify, don't you see, even if you can't protect yourself, because your family is about to lose you anyhow. You wish to die, and will die. What do you care that the work is dangerous? If you're killed, you're only dead. You're dead if you kill yourself. The difference is twenty-five dollars."

"How do I know you'll pay me the twenty-five dollars?" the other demanded fiercely.

"If I pay you in advance?"

"And how do I know that this work that is dangerous is not work that I'd rather be dead than do?"

"You're to be the judge. You're not held to the bargain if you wish to renounce it."

"And pay you back the money—just like that?"

"That would be fair, surely. Still, if I pay you in advance, you can refuse to

do the work, and I shall have no recourse. That being the case, it will cost me nothing to agree that if you decide against the job, you may keep the money."

"All right. What did you mean by saying, if I can qualify?"

De Regla pulled upon his cigar; then, reaching into his pocket, he drew forth another.

"Do you smoke? I don't care for the brand, myself, but I happen to have these with me. Try one. Use my match-box. It's easier to talk into your own smoke, I find, than into another man's. . . . That's better. If you can qualify? I meant, if the danger doesn't scare you off."

"My name is Rawlins," the other blurted—and began laughing for no reason at all, like a woman in hysterics.

"And mine is De Regla. I'm a museum man. Jewels, just at present. And here is your money, for the night's work, with a little added for taxi-hire and phone calls. You could ride with me, but we separate. I need your report of what you learn by yourself, after I leave this boat."

"I don't know why I did that, Mr. De Regla."

"It was the lights and the sky and the water. They get me too, sometimes. You weren't really laughing."

"Tell me what you want me to do, and I'll do it," said the other.

After that for a while De Regla became so busy explaining his thought and answering questions that he forgot the coal on his cigar. When he had finished, he said:

"Phone me at the Whitethorn Hotel. I'll be in the lobby. Now I must leave you, before we're seen together."

Whereupon he slipped back to the door, glanced inside, and returned to his seat, leaving the man he had hired at the rail, unloading his pockets of stones.

UPON reaching the Whitethorn Hotel De Regla was not met by the police detective; instead he was handed a note stating that Haverhill would be delayed in arriving, but wished the museum man to remain within reach.

Presently a paged telephone-call sent him to a booth. The call proved to be from Rawlins, at the St. Nazaire.

"Yes, Rawlins. I have that—the St. Nazaire. Shoot."

"From the beginning?"

"Give me everything you have."

Upon leaving De Regla, Rawlins had gone to the upper deck to look for the Hindu, he said, and had identified him at once, by the turban. Later the Hindu had led him back downstairs.

"When you left the boat at the ferry, he was standing behind a mail-truck. You were right about his not being alone—a tall, flat-faced man with a suitcase joined him there. The two of them crossed the gangplank behind you."

"I had guessed at something of the sort," said De Regla.

"IS that second man related to you, Mr. De Regla?" asked Rawlins, in a somewhat hesitant way.

"To me? No! His name is Namorski. Why do you ask?"

"I'm coming to that. . . . That man has the air of a swell, but he's a bad egg. That man would cut your throat. He's a butcher. I see now why you wanted the Hindu followed."

"Namorski has a touch of the lock-step in his walk at times. I didn't speak of him, because I needed your independent note on him. He's bad, as you say."

"I'd like to know what's in his suitcase!"

"These men left the boat together. What then?"

"They tailed you to your cab," said Rawlins. "This Namorski was standing behind you when you gave your directions."

"And you behind him, I hope, when he gave his."

"It was the Hindu gave the directions. They took me to the St. Nazaire, where I am now. The Hindu I think was already a guest. Anyhow, the clerk knew him. This Namorski registered, and then asked if a message had been left for him. The clerk gave him an envelope. I heard him say that Mr. Fairbody had sent the car for him."

"Say that again, Rawlins. Not Fairbody. Fairbody's dead."

"Mr. Fairbody had sent his car for him. The driver was waiting in the lobby. The clerk pointed him out."

"Go on."

"I was standing at the desk, waiting to inquire about a name I had made up. When the clerk gave the key to a bellhop, this Namorski said he had something in his suitcase he wished to show Mr. Fairbody, and he wouldn't go up to his room until later. So then he and the Hindu got the driver, and they went

out to the car. When they were gone, I looked at the register. That's why I asked you if you were related."

"What name did he use?" asked De Regla.

"Your name."

"Say that again."

"This Namorski signed himself Lucas de Regla," replied Rawlins.

"They left in Fairbody's car, you say. Did you happen to notice the car?"

"A Bartley twelve," said Rawlins. "I saw it leave."

"Hold the wire a second."

The police? The crooks were already on their way out of the city. The only policeman within reach was De Regla himself. The Fairbody car he did not understand; the driver might have been sent to the city earlier, before learning of the murder, or for some other reason had not yet heard of it. He might have said also that he was not sure what the crooks had in mind.

Could it be possible that the crooks did not yet know of the murder? That was plainly possible.

For if they did know of it, how explain their present interest in Fairbody? They had gone off in the Fairbody car. And if they did, why had the Hindu called in this Eastern crook to ride with him? And if they did, where were they bound? And if they did, why had Namorski taken De Regla's name?

In any case, what was needed was instant action.

"Listen, Rawlins," he said. "Go to the St. Nazaire garage and have them fix up a rental, *muy pronto*, right off. I'll call for it in about five minutes. You're to go with me. We'll decide on the road what to do."

Inasmuch as Haverhill was already late, he would probably be later. They could be back in an hour or so. De Regla followed the detective's example and left word for him at the desk, without saying where he had gone.

HE had known the road down the peninsula was no speedway. Here and there delays occurred—in the city, the wrong lights; later, delays caused by slow-moving trucks, and at one point, by a tangle of traffic, not yet straightened out, where a Bartley twelve had bloodied its nose against an ancient Brulé.

The man at the garage had been able to direct him to the Fairbody place. After passing through San Bruno, De



Regla was to look for a log-style filling station, and at a certain corner beyond, follow a crooked road to a half-built stone gate on the left, and then wind about between hedges and among trees until he came to the house.

"This may turn out to be worse work than I promised," De Regla said to Rawlins after a while. "Mind if I ask you a question?"

"Not now—you have the right."

"I know you're married. Have you any children?"

"Two. One is three; one is six."

"Insurance?"

"Lapsed," said the other.

"What's ahead for the wife, with you gone? Anything definite?"

"That's what I had in mind. She was a teacher before she married me. A widow can get a job."

"But a married woman can't?"

"She's been trying. No good." He broke out: "I'd sell my soul into hell for that girl, if there was any market!"

"You're under orders," said De Regla.

"I understand."

"Here is the first: Take no risks that aren't needed."

THEY approached the house on foot from in front, using the shelter of a silver spruce. De Regla had driven boldly, without dimming his lights, as far as to the crooked road. After that he had become cautious, parking his car outside the gate. As they drew near the house, they saw that a Bartley twelve stood at the door. Its driver seemed to be looking it over for damages.

"They're here," said Rawlins.

"Yes. But where are the police cars? Where's the police guard at the door? Something is very wrong here, Rawlins. This is no house of death."

Again De Regla went over what had happened. Suppose the wire he had received had been sent by the Hindu, forging the police name? That could easily have occurred. If so, why? The answer might be, to keep De Regla from going to the St. Nazaire. And why that? That answer might be, to give Namorski the chance to assume his name.

And, of course, why that, again?

That answer might be something like this: De Regla was known to be on his way to appraise certain rubies for the new gold king. Namorski could pretend to appraise them, and thus get his hands on them. Their theft in that case would be at the point of a pistol.

That did not altogether make sense. Too much clumsy publicity. Too many witnesses.

At least the men were now inside, presumably with Fairbody, and presumably within reach of the jewels. One of them was Namorski, a known killer.

"I'm going back now to block the road with the rental," said the older man. "Wait for them here, then follow. Meet me at that live-oak we selected."

"I'll be there!"

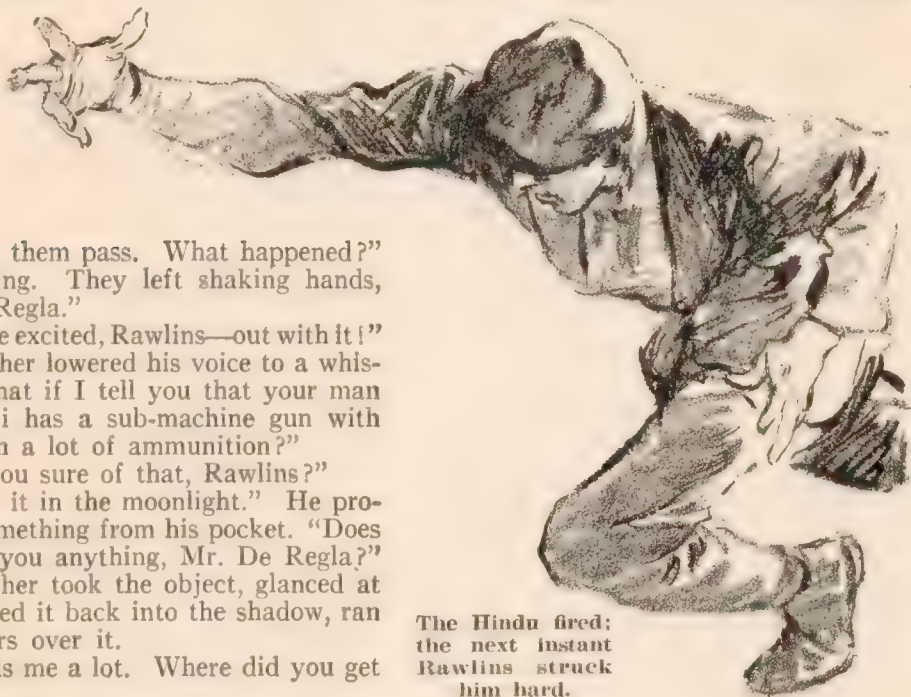
De Regla was standing in the shadow when Rawlins found him, more than half an hour later.

"Don't need it!"

De Regla had been edging forward now for some minutes, moving from shadow to shadow as he could. The moon stood too near overhead to be of the greatest service as a maker of shadows. The road here, cramped by hedges, had narrowed to a bottle-neck.

In the end he found the car where he had expected to find it—a black-bodied Bartley, its headlights playing upon the rental that blocked the road fifty feet ahead.

A movement over the outlined black bulk of it caught his eye. The Hindu



The Hindu fired:
the next instant
Rawlins struck
him hard.

"I saw them pass. What happened?"

"Nothing. They left shaking hands, Mr. De Regla."

"You're excited, Rawlins—out with it!"

The other lowered his voice to a whisper. "What if I tell you that your man Namorski has a sub-machine gun with him, with a lot of ammunition?"

"Are you sure of that, Rawlins?"

"I saw it in the moonlight." He produced something from his pocket. "Does this tell you anything, Mr. De Regla?"

The other took the object, glanced at it, whipped it back into the shadow, ran his fingers over it.

"It tells me a lot. Where did you get it?"

"Surgery." He stopped to listen. "The driver had to go to the garage for tools to straighten his headlights. I got it while he was gone."

"No, Rawlins. Not in that short time."

"He had to go again, to take them back. In between."

AGAIN De Regla ran his fingers over the object. "If I don't misunderstand you—"

"You don't. I lifted out the suitcase."

"It's a useful thing to know," said the other.

How useful, was soon to appear.

"Here we separate. Slip around to the gate, as we planned. If you hear my voice, raise yours. If one of them breaks for the road, try to keep him in sight. I can take care of one of them. I should have borrowed a gun for you."

was out in front with his pistol on the driver, edging him along the hedge. He knew he was in a trap, and intended to escape by shielding himself behind the driver. De Regla had expected him to try and back out the car.

A moment later he saw Namorski, kneeling with the sub-machine gun between the left rear wheel and the hedge. Namorski, sheltered on three sides, was plainly waiting for some one to approach in the open from behind.

A pair of town rats trapped in a country alley, and neither with the least idea what to do next!

Rawlins had made the thing possible. Stepping boldly forth into the moonlight, De Regla calmly walked down the lane toward the man in ambush. Presently he said:

"Put down that gun, Namorski. Put it down."

The other, springing to his feet, waited until he could not miss. Then he let go. All that happened was a click.

"Won't work, Namorski. Hold up your hands—fast! Now come out of there and turn around!"

The Hindu may have heard the click. On hearing the command that followed, he seemed to lose his head. Thrusting the driver aside, he bolted, his pistol in one hand, his fat satchel in the other—not smart work at all.

De Regla had not dreamed that Rawlins had crept up so close. He himself stood behind Namorski with his pistol pressed into the man's back, but with his eyes ahead watching the Hindu's flying heels. Suddenly to his horror a shadow ahead against the hedge erupted, and a figure shot out as if impelled by a spring. It was good football, but not against a runner armed with a pistol.

The Hindu saw him, whipped up his arm, fired twice. The next instant Rawlins struck him hard. The pistol did the very difficult triple somersault before striking the ground, but did not again speak.

After that the job was one for Fairbody's driver, with a length of rope from the car.

"What made you do a fool thing like that? I told you not to take needless risks!" remonstrated De Regla.

"I figured that he was a safer bet while he was running than he would be standing still. Besides, that's what you hired me to do, Mr. De Regla. You spoke of the danger."

"Did he hit you?"

"Creased my left arm. A bare scratch."

"But it wasn't necessary!"

"It might have been. I figured that if he broke free, he might kill somebody. So I took him in time."

"Search him. . . . I thought so. My man shelled out another. A pair of bad eggs."

He spoke to the driver.

"Can you back that Bartley to an open place, driver, where you can turn around?"

"Sure can."

"Then take us to the house. We wish to see Mr. Fairbody."

THE windows of the library were still lighted—their owner had not yet gone to bed. The driver explained that Fairbody would have to come to the door

himself. For some reason he had packed off the servants.

"Fetch your Hindu with you, Rawlins. . . . You too, driver. . . . Now, Namorski—march!"

Clumping up the front steps, De Regla began punching patterns into the porcelain bell on the jamb. The clamor that resulted brought forth the lean-faced master of the house.

"Thugs? Come inside, Officer, into the light."

When they had entered the hall and the driver had set down the machine-gun and the suitcase and the fat satchel, and the Hindu had exploded into protest, Fairbody said:

"My driver could have told you, Officer. These gentlemen are my guests."

He named them off. The Hindu was Mr. Sampur, of the Madras Presidency, in India. Namorski was Mr. De Regla, of Meldon Memorial, in Chicago, just in from Portland. And so on.

DE REGLA looked at the gold king. The adventure that any museum man must have expected was turning out well. Fairbody had mistaken two crooks for honest men. He had mistaken De Regla for an officer of the law. He had mistaken himself for a man able to drive sharp bargains.

"Just in from Portland to do what?"

"To pass on some rubies I was buying for my wife. He's a jewel-expert. He told me they were good, so I bought them."

"Bought them of whom?"

"Mr. Sampur, acting for their owner."

That was action at first sight, surely. De Regla looked again at the Hindu; the man had dressed his turban in another mode since leaving the train, but still not in the *pagri* manner.

"Your friend required payment in cash?"

Fairbody snapped: "If I say I know him, isn't that enough?"

"Not enough. You told me that this big fellow was named De Regla. Well, he isn't. His name is Namorski. He's an escaped convict and a killer. There on the floor is the machine-gun he left in your car while he went into the house to tell you to buy Sampur's rubies. He went into your house with his killer's pistol in a holster under his arm."

De Regla could not blame Fairbody for believing in his star. The man had been a poor clerk out of work. He had discovered gold in a spot that had been



"He's a jewel-expert. He told me they were good, so I bought them."

prospected over and over, merely because he did not know any better than to look for it there. Now he was hunting a blind man's bargain in rubies.

"Mr. Sampur is in another case," he replied stubbornly.

"Rubies out of India, sold to you for an owner still in India, by a Hindu out of San Francisco!"

"I am from India!" cried the Hindu.

"A Hindu!" De Regla stepped to his side and seized his wrist. "See! I push up his sleeve!"

A Mohammedan would have called it kismet, the preordained will of God. Sampur called it something less pretty.

"You've stained your face and neck and hands with butternut, and slipped a turban on your head, and that's the Hindu you are! . . . Rawlins, take care of these crooks. Turn them facing the wall. . . . Now, Mr. Fairbody, you might show me the rubies you bought—perhaps at a table, under a better light. My name is Lucas De Regla."

Fairbody looked his unhappiness, as he led the way into the library. He returned from the safe with his rubies. They lay against the white satin lining of their casket like the blood of evening sunlight splashed on summer cloud. They were genuine rubies, not imitations in paste. Their color was true pigeon's

blood. But they had not come from India.

"Synthetic," said De Regla tersely, after a glance through his jeweler's loupe. "Worth up to a dollar a carat."

"I paid him a hundred and fifty thousand for them!" cried Fairbody.

De Regla laid them back on the satin.

"I think you would have paid him more if you had refused to buy them. You might have paid with your life."

LATER, after the fat satchel had been placed in the safe and the police had taken away the prisoners, De Regla sat in the rental talking to Rawlins. This time he was driving slowly.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," he said. "I made Fairbody offer the reward, and you are going to accept it. The check is made out to you. It will be paid. You are going with me in the morning to a bank I know and start an account."

"But I didn't earn it!"

"You gave that crook two shots at you. You recovered Fairbody's money."

"He would have got that back anyhow, Mr. De Regla."

"How?"

"When the crooks were captured."

"Who would have captured them?"

"You. The police."

"Not I. Possibly the police, but not on any complaint that Fairbody would have made. I showed him that the Hindu was a fraud; but I had the Hindu there to prove it. You had stopped him. If you hadn't, Fairbody would have lived and died believing in his rubies. All the Hindu needed was five minutes at a hydrant. Possibly not even that. I don't know that he's wanted anywhere for anything. . . . Namorski, yes. But not that fellow."

"But the amount!"

"Twenty per cent is thirty thousand dollars. Fair enough. You're both ahead on the deal, and so am I."

"That specimen?"

"That specimen, as you call it, is worth more than money. It's the finest of its kind. The gold in it alone would bring ten thousand dollars. And Fairbody had given it to Namorski, to chuck into his suitcase!"

"But Mr. De Regla—"

"I'll tell you; We'll leave it to your wife. Explain everything; then if she says return it, why return it."

"Explain—about the boat?"

"Everything."

"Not now. I couldn't!"

"There's another point to consider. Why did Haverhill wire me that Fairbody had been murdered? The answer is, he didn't. Sampur forged his name. He wished to get me away from the St. Nazaire, so as to register in my name, and he wished to get hold of me later, after his return with his loot. Do you know why? I think, in order to tell me that Haverhill had sent for me. Suppose I went with him and failed to return? Who would ever know that any of this had happened?"

"Those crooks would have killed you?"

"Do you believe it so unlikely?"

Rawlins went back in his mind to his actions on leaving the boat. He had trailed the crooks to the St. Nazaire, had watched Namorski register, had heard the clerk direct him then to Fairbody's driver, had noted the car, had seen it depart, had reported the facts to the other. He had to admit that his work had not been wholly useless. Then his thoughts began leaping ahead to his wife and his children.

Again he began laughing, for no reason whatever.

"This is my lucky night," he said. "You win!"

"That's better. Nine o'clock, at the Whitethorn Hotel!"

Kioga of

The conclusion of this epic trilogy of adventure beyond a newfound frontier.

The Story Thus Far:

WE had been wrecked, Captain Scott and John La Salle and I, upon the rocky coast of that newfound land Nato'wa—a strange forest-clad region north of Siberia, warmed by volcanic fires and inhabited by the progenitors of the American Indian. We had come upon a desperate venture: the rescue of other castaways—the scientist James Munro, founder of the museum of which I was curator; Beth and Dan La Salle, daughter and son of the wealthy man who had financed Munro's expedition; and Lincoln Rand, better known as Kioga the Snow Hawk, grown to powerful manhood among the Indians of Nato'wa after his missionary parents had died.

A marauding crew of gold-hunters, we knew, had made a safe landing ahead of us; we must be on guard against them and the hostile Shoni Indians.

I set out alone in search of our friends, and found one of them, Kioga the Snow Hawk; and he led us to the others.

A happy reunion of our party followed with Beth La Salle and Munro and his quaint factotum Flashpan; but Dan La Salle had been captured by the Shoni, and we rescued him from them only after he had been tortured. For this expedition our party had been divided. And with Kioga, Munro, Flashpan and the Indian boy Tokala, I was trapped in a series of vast caverns in the gigantic mountain range beyond which lived, it was said, the blue-eyed People of the Tusk. Wandering by torchlight far into this rocky maze, we came upon a royal burial-chamber; here Munro hung about Tokala's neck a golden plaque we found. Later we came out into the open air, and saw men working with great prehistoric mastodons in harness; and were ourselves set upon and captured by the People of the Tusk.

A time of great danger for all of us followed in this strange hermit kingdom. But for Kioga—separated from us, enslaved but finally fighting his way to

the Unknown Land

By

WILLIAM CHESTER



freedom and preferment as a warrior—peril was constant. And though he won the favor of lovely Princess Loalli, the jealousy of certain suitor nobles was a threat deadly indeed. To little Tokala, on the other hand, the path was smoothed. For the golden plaque identified him as a long-awaited prince who should rule the M'Anda kingdom, and he received royal welcome.

For generations these People of the Tusk had labored ceaselessly to tunnel the unscalable mountains which hemmed them round; and this age-long work of their slaves and their mastodon beasts of burden was near completion. Indeed one day while exploring in one of their tunnels we at last established communication with Dan La Salle and our other friends beyond the barrier, for Flashpan's pet monkey Placer squirmed through a crevice and bore several messages back and forth. It was shortly after this that the crisis came: A civil war broke out in M'Anda; and this, coupled with a false report that the tunnel had reached daylight beyond the mountains, precipitated a revolt of the slaves. . . . As our only resort, we took refuge in the tunnel itself. (*The story concludes in detail.*)

AS we approached the inner entrance to the tunnel, we had become part of a flowing river of humanity, still acting upon the false rumor that the tunnel

Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon



"O men of mighty voices and little courage, who would destroy the little Ru—first you must destroy Loalli."

had been holed through. Slaves of less angry temperament strode side by side with poorer freemen, laden with their few possessions, and heading toward that hoped-for exit to a newer and better existence in a larger outside world. The endless tramp of multitudes was that of men migrating—toward a tragic disappointment. For at the entry to the tunnel, they found the human tide dammed back, confronted by the information that the tunnel still was uncompleted.

Here Tali, overseer of operations in the tunnel, met and joined us. As they had done for countless generations, the mammoth labor-beasts made their exit, dragging forth the rumbling sledges, laden heavily with rock. Their toil was interfered with by the presence of those hopefuls crowding near the entrance. As yet no one, save those entitled to pass in and out, had been admitted by the strong guard at the entrance.

But with Tali in our company, we had no difficulty gaining access to the borings

and passing through to the far end, where slaves still toiled, bracing up the cracking ceiling with timbers which to my unpracticed eye seemed hopelessly inadequate.

Because of the danger from falling fragments and the risks attendant upon the movement of slaves and mammoths in such close quarters, Tokala had been left in the company of Ameeg the thief and those loyal slaves whom he had released from confinement under the arena. These faithful guarded him some distance in our rear.

And now we set to work, like common slaves, to compass what we knew was nearer realization than the M'Anda toilers thought. If what Dan's message from beyond had said was true, now more than ever sounds of our toil must be audible to them in the world beyond, since many tons of rock had been excavated since that time.

On our arrival the wall ahead was honeycombed with borings about the



diameter of barrels and ranging eight or ten feet into the solid stone. It was Munro's idea to enter one of these, head-first, and seek to make a contact with Dan La Salle beyond. Dan, he knew, was skilled in radio and knew the Morse code well. Munro's own knowledge of Morse, acquired of necessity in order to talk back and forth while Dan was learning it, might now prove useful.

Armed with a chipping-hammer from the heaps of digging tools near by, he tapped out sharply in Morse the triple letter S.O.S., listening then for some reply. Faint and seeming far away there came a dim response—his S.O.S. repeated and the words: "I hear you. What can we do to help? Dan." The answer came with practiced speed. "Stand by," returned Munro, not so quickly, since his skill in code did not equal Dan's. "Will advise."

Munro emerged then to consult with us.

"Find out how many men Dan has

available, and what arms they carry," said Kioga, already thinking of our final exit from the M'Anda realm. Munro crawled back and made inquiry in code.

"Twenty Shoni braves," was Dan's tapped-out reply. "Armed with smooth-bores, ball and powder from the store at Fort Talking Raven."

"What is the state of things among the Shoni?"

"They're on the warpath now. No telling what may happen, or when. Can't you hurry?"

"Doing all we can," replied Munro. "Can you help?"

"Have planted mine of powder. Say when!"

"Not yet. Rock still too thick. Wait further word. Stand by!"

Munro came from the boring just as Tali and his laborers drew near, again to attack the rock with all their force, though little realizing how near success was in their grasp. Nor did we enlighten them, lest intimation might reach that

dammed-back mob beyond the entrance and cause a concerted rush and consequent interruption of the labor.

But interruption came in other guise, and danger, which we thought had been left behind, appeared with stunning suddenness. The laborers had worked a second day and night, hewing yet another layer from the rock which separated us from freedom. The time had almost come when Munro would signal Dan to detonate his charge of explosives, in the hope of doing in one blow what might yet require many days if left to slave-labor on our own side.

The tunnel now was filled with sounds of mammoths, trumpeting as they toiled, the clinking fall of hammers on the solid rock, the shouts and cries of slaves, the crack of whips on leathery rumps, when out of turmoil leaped a cry of warning, followed by the piercing whistle of the overseer.

THE slaves, well-trained to the instant obedience on which their lives might depend, stopped work at once, alert to the supposed danger of a cave-in. But the threat proved not from nature, but from man. Advancing came a troop of soldiery, led by two of the nobles who had sat within the hall of state and somehow evaded the fate which befell so many of their peers.

With dagger-blades drawn and *kuris* bared, there could be little doubt of their hostility. Arrayed against them were ourselves and the laborers in the tunnel, armed only with the tools with which we toiled. Faced thus with show of force, the leading noble advanced alone, his eyes upon Kioga with instant recognition. He spoke.

"Well met, O maker of spurious kings! What have you now to say before we put an end to you, and this impostor whom you call the little Ru?"

"No more than this, High-born," answered Kioga coolly, though we knew he sparred for time. "To put an end to him, you first must put an end to us, then find him. If you do that, who then will hole your tunnel through? Will your proud soldiers stoop to do the task of slaves?"

"Not so," the other sneered contemptuously. "The slaves will do the bidding of my soldiers. Is this not so, O tattered rabble? Dare you defy the orders of your masters? Turn and destroy these interlopers! Disobey, and you shall be entombed and left to die!"

The noble's words came forth whiplike to lash these laborers who all their lives had done the bidding of a higher caste. Knowing only by hearsay of events transpiring in the City of Kings, they cringed before this wrathful harangue. Eyes slid from the noble to Kioga, then to us. Toil-calloused hands fingered heavy tools nervously. Kioga signaled to Munro Flashpan and me to group ourselves together, ready for the worst.

SWIFT to seize upon the indecision of the slaves, the noble cracked the whip of his voice again. "Put down your tools and file between us, and no harm shall come to you. Obey! A noble speaks!"

The slaves were vassals still—eager to defy, but too long trained in the habit of unquestioning obedience. A moment later we stood alone, four men against four hundred or four thousand, we knew not which. All that had been gained was lost. And what would become of Tokala?

But we had left one person out of consideration. Her intervention came like light in darkness, preceded by a crash as if a mammoth had been put against a creaking gate. Part of the wall burst outward like a shell, revealing the offshoot of some old abandoned work. Our present tunnel had apparently crossed just before the point at which another boring had been discontinued. Begrimed with marks of travel underground, but none the less superb and beautiful, Loalli came in view upon a giant bull. Beside her, to our surprise, sat Tokala, the royal plaque exposed. Behind Loalli came her faithful retinue, both soldiery and slaves, among them Ameeg and his men, met with in their explorations for a hiding-place in which to secrete Tokala their king.

Loalli's voice was keen with scorn. "O men of mighty voices and little courage, who would destroy the little Ru—first you must destroy Loalli and her following!"

"Hast ordered, High-born. It shall be done!" cried one of the nobles in a tone that dripped with venom. He raised a *mola* from his belt and swung it for a throw designed to catch her in the breast.

But Kioga was before him by the fraction of a second. A pointed bar used in prying stones apart, hurled with mighty force, impaled the noble where he stood. The *mola* spun through air and missed Loalli by no more than a hand's-breadth, lodging with a thud in a timber upright just beside her.

CHAPTER XIX

A moment later her supporters and the other soldiery were at grips. The slaves, released from the fears which earlier had weakened them in favor of our enemies, gained courage and supported Loalli against the other nobles. Between the two, they routed and drove them several hundred yards before them, leaving only our small group to give thanks for this timely interruption.

The sounds of combat now abating in the distance, we heard the insistent tapping on the wall, frantically calling on us for an explanation of our silence. The tapping now was clear. Munro stepped to the wall and sent his message out.

"Explode your mine."

The answer came back quick and clear. *"O. K. Stand back!"*

A minute passed, then two. I glanced back into the tunnel, to see Loalli, swept back before her men on the crest of the fighting wave, now returning toward us on her stately bull. She was perhaps three hundred yards away, and clearly visible in the tunnel, Tokala waving to us from beside her on the stately mount, while Ameeg and his men swung lanterns at their side triumphantly.

Then from behind me came a terrific concussion. Rock-dust filled our nostrils as Dan's mine exploded. Behind I saw a ragged hole appear—which led out to the world we knew. I turned back toward Loalli, who suddenly had checked her mount and wheeled the bull in the opposite direction. A moment later I saw why she had turned.

An upright timber, loosened by the impact of a passing mammoth, and, shaken by the blast we felt, had fallen. The shoring of the tunnel roof was now collapsing at that point. I saw the next supports give way and buckle. The falling débris shut out the sight of Loalli for a moment before we had a glimpse of her again, well on her way in swift retreat.

Then with the deep and booming roll of thunder, complete catastrophe and chaos ensued.

"God help us! The tunnel's cavin' in!" cried Flashpan.

A BLAST of air thick-laden with rock-dust hurled all of us back. The rock above where we had stood fell rumbling. The tunnel through which we had come was sealed, beyond all possibility of unsealing it, deep within the mountain.

This much I realized, before my head struck hard against the ground; whereafter, all was throbbing blackness.

I CAME back to the world of consciousness to hear the excited gutturals of the Shoni warriors who bent above me, dashing icy water on my face and neck. The first face I saw was Kioga's, cut and bruised. Dan stood beside him. I heard his voice:

"Feel all right, Kirk?"

"Not too bad," I managed. "How about Munro and Flashpan?"

"Bruised like yourself."

"Tokala?" I could not quite remember what had happened.

"That's something we may never know," Kioga answered thoughtfully, in a tone which told how deeply he was moved. "We saw him with Loalli last. Whether they got back successfully to a safe place inside the tunnel, we can't surmise. We can only hope."

"And the hermit people of M'Anda?" I rose to shake myself into some kind of self-control. Flashpan sat near by with Munro, resting. Kioga pointed at the chaotic mass of splintered rock and rubble which filled the hole Dan's powder-mine had blasted.

I saw a hand thrust from the dusty heap—a human hand clenched tight in death. Upon its back was burned the brownish brand-mark of a slave. But in the rigid clutch there was a jeweled dagger, the emblem of a man who at the last had fought for liberty. About the wrist there was a shackle, clinging only because the hand rested within it on the ground. The shackle itself was broken.

"He was the only one to see the light of outer freedom?"

"The only one," Kioga answered me.

Munro spoke: "I hope the broken shackle is an augury of liberty amid their old surroundings for those we left behind; for they are destined to remain a hermit race, perhaps forever."

We four stood thoughtful, while Dan threw earth upon the hand and its broken shackle. The hard-gripped dagger Munro pried loose. "The only memento, except the rags we wear, of the adventure among the T'emaho. He'll never need it now."

"And Tokala?" reiterated Dan. "Must we go without him?"

"We must," Kioga answered. "Don't forget that Loalli is the king's ally. If he survived the tunnel, she will find a way to protect him."

Whatever Tokala's fate might be, we had not time to linger over it. From the

forest, to our meeting-place here at the mountain's base, there came a runner, spent and gasping, with news which told Kioga there was to be no rest. The Indian jerked the words out in the Shoni tongue:

"Shoni braves on—warpath—passing down the river to burn the white men's lodges." This meant the miners' cabins, as well as the blockhouse wherein Beth waited, Kioga realized.

Pausing only long enough to take the exhausted Indian's weapons, and inform the rest of us of his intentions, Kioga set forth downriver, relieved to tread once more the forest trails which he had known since boyhood.

The ground was soft and Kioga did not wish to leave a trail; he therefore chose to travel by the strength of wrist and arm, swinging thus below the overhanging thickets which brushed the river. He chose his hand-grips with unerring instinct, and passed through semi-darkness with the facility of a nocturnal cat. Though there were breaks in his highway here and there, necessitating foot-travel on and near the river-bank, his pace was none the less as swift or swifter than a speeding long-boat on the river.

Ultimately it was he who overtook a Shoni war-canoe, laden deep with braves, all painted as for combat. The messenger had been correct. The war-canoe joined others in a cove not far from where the river-boat *Amazon* had destroyed a dozen of the finest Shoni craft with that one shot from her forward gun.

KIOGA knew palaver would precede action, and a bravery-dance would give him extra time now, the while it spurred them on to more cruel outrages later. He had at most a few hours in which to work. It took him one of those to reach the blockhouse. To avoid being mistaken for a hostile, he called Beth's name as he approached.

The girl, until this moment all but certain he was dead, sprang up as if electrified. She met him at the swinging rough-hewn door. He stood a moment, hardly recognizing her, what with the stains of tragedy beneath her eyes, unprecedented hollows in her cheeks, and the fragile slimness to which his long absence and the uncertainty of his fate had reduced her.

Until this moment of reunion Beth had not once let down. But now she saw him nearing her as through a mist, and felt a helpless welling of the tears from between her lids. Despite the thousand

things that clamored to be uttered, she could not speak, nor act more than to wait for him with open arms.

For once Kioga's perception slumbered. He did not note the stealthy swinging of the rough-hewn door behind him, nor glimpse the two shadows, one well behind the other, stealing up along the trail which he had left from river-bank to blockhouse entrance. He did not hear the silent footfalls on the threshold, nor the faint metallic *click* of rifle-hammer being thumbed. No inkling of his peril came to warn the Snow Hawk until—two shots rang deafeningly out.

FOR sheer capacity and industry under most extraordinary circumstances, the palm is due to Captain Phineas Scott, for the bones of his ship the *Bearcat* had hardly been battered out of sight by the waves which combed the reefs, when he, abetted by his men, set out to build another vessel to replace her. Now, with the work all but completed, Scott stood almost knee-deep in chips and shavings, beholding with fair pride the handiwork of himself and his men.

"'Tis all of a miracle, lads," he told them. "She's built! She's calked and made to battle ice. We've but to knock the blocks away come next high tide, butter the skids a bit, and down she'll slide, down to the briny, a proper ship, though I warrant she's no Eel de France." The doughty Captain rubbed his horny hands. "Sven Svenson, you were born and raised a whaler's gunner. There'll be a chance for you to shoot again. We salvaged the *Bearcat's* harpoon gun, and above a hundred of her bombs and good black powder, for which we may have use. MacGregor, here, will help ye bolt it on the foredeck. Lose no time."

Scott turned then to Tom Codd. "What news from Kias, whom we set the task of freightin' down the cannon from Fort Talking Raven?"

The words had hardly left his lips when some one called that Kias was approaching. Scott glanced and swore with hearty gusto. The Indian, flanked by a score of red allies, bore in the Captain's answer—four of the fort's crudely mounted, hand-cast cannon, small but serviceable, together with a supply of rusty iron scrap and ball. There was another gun of smaller bore hidden in the rocks above their heads, as a defense should enemies approach down either rocky beach. This, with its ball and powder, was now brought down.



"God help us! The tunnel's cavin' in!" cried Flashpan.

The Indians also carried in the fort's full supply of smaller arms, the greater part of which had been hand-fashioned within the walls. These several arms, together with supplies of bows and arrows, should need for them arise, were stored between the decks.

All such precautions were taken against no foe of Scott's imagination. The ship must be launched and floated at high tide, then immediately worked several miles along the coast to gain

the sheltering bay in which the *Pirate* lay. Only from that point could we attain the channel leading out to sea. And, for a day or possibly for several days, we should be in view of the raiding miners ashore or on their hostile ship, and vulnerable to some extent to possible attack.

Scott's Indian friendlies hunted in the neighboring forest for elk and moose, whose meat was smoked and stored within the hull as reserve victuals for the final voyage from Nato'wa. Water, too,

was taken on, but not in great quantity; for Scott well knew that once at sea, fresh water could be found almost at will atop the floes. A monster bear was killed, and its fat was used to grease thickly the skids down which the ship would slide when all was ready.

Scott had also kept a weather eye upon the *Pirate's* crew, by means of one of Kias' roving scouts; and learned that since they had already found great quantities of gold, they might at any moment put to sea, to take advantage of the seasonal break-up of the ice-floes.

From Dan he had no other word, though young La Salle, accompanied by ourselves and his own warriors, was heading swiftly down the turbulent Hi-wasi, tossed in their creaking bark canoes. In these we rode no longer than was necessary to reach the river-boat the *Amazon*, moored up a little creek under cover of the overcurling thicket growth. At once the *Amazon* was got out on the river, her skin sail raised to take a following wind; at fair speed we descended toward the blockhouse, where, long before we came, Kioga had preceded us.

NEARLY deafened by the explosion of two firearms at such close range, the Snow Hawk wheeled, thrust Beth behind him, and saw a warrior sprawled face-down across the threshold of the blockhouse. Behind, with gun now clubbed and held in readiness, John La Salle stood crouched, waiting for the hostile brave to move.

"He's dead," Kioga told him, stepping forward to seize the hand Beth's father had extended in a cordial welcome, and with the grasp to drag La Salle in to safety.

And only just in time. For as Kioga swung the great door to, the twang of bow-cords came from beyond, and two arrows from the forest chugged into the panels venomously. Dan's information had been well-founded. The Shoni braves were hostile to all whites. A scouting party, of which the dead warrior was undoubtedly one, waited now for one false move, to take the scalps of those within the blockhouse.

They would not attack in open front, Kioga knew well. Nor was he deceived by hours of uninterrupted silence which ensued; the Shoni braves, true Indians, could wait with panther patience until the prey, lulled to a false sense of security, did one wrong thing.

Within the blockhouse Beth, Kioga

and the elder La Salle laid their loaded guns beside them and kept their eyes glued to the firing-slits in the walls. The short hours of faint light which was Nato'wan day at this time of the year gloomed into night, and still they heard no sound. At intervals Kioga related to them all of our strange adventures in the realm of M'Anda, to occupy their minds with other things besides the danger which hourly multiplied.

For if the Shoni force was great, Dan and the others, returning down-river in the *Amazon*, might walk into an ambush unawares. He must devise the means of precipitating action before that could occur. Pondering it, Kioga saw a point of light flame up and spring through space like a meteor. There was a thud upon the roof, the smell of burning resin, followed by the crackling sound of fired wood. Thus had the Shoni chosen to strike.

As the flames took hold upon the blockhouse roof, the shadow of the *Amazon* appeared upriver, and we aboard her beheld the blazing blockhouse with horror. The wind still favored us, but it seemed hours until we neared the bank on which the small log stronghold stood.

We heard a shot ring crisply out, followed by a shriek of pain and fury from the woods. Dan grabbed his gun and sought to spring out into the water, but Flashpan checked him with a yell of warning. A naked shadow with straining bow stood on the bank. The miner brought the threatening savage down with one clean shot, then hurled our anchors over, fore and aft, within good rifle-range of the blockhouse.

A shout apprised us that Kioga heard our shot.

"Come out!" cried Flashpan. "We'll cover yore retreat." Without an instant's hesitation John La Salle, Beth and Kioga bounded forth. Simultaneously we on board the *Amazon* sent our bullets crashing through the brush on either side of them, so that they reached the bank through a veritable lane of flying lead. The savages, bewildered by the sudden break for safety, were late in sending forth their shafts, the more astonished by having three swiftly moving targets at which to shoot.

The three were at the bank, then knee-deep in the river, before the first reeds whistled through the air to cut them down.

But now the Snow Hawk employed an old device, and threw his two companions

headlong on their faces in the water, with the quick words "Dive and swim!" Arrows skittered close about, but a moment later eager hands were hauling them aboard, unhurt.

Although we had expended ammunition, we had had no targets at which to aim and did the hostiles no hurt; and so, perceiving us up our anchors and slowly gather headway, they bounded from concealment, drew forth their long canoes from somewhere and set out in pursuit.

"They must be from the far interior," La Salle declared, "or they'd know better than to attack us in the open."

"They'll l'arn!" said Flashpan, pouring powder down his pistols' mouths.

"Wait!" said Kioga sharply. "I'm all against unnecessary shooting. We'll have better use for our powder later. Hold off, and don't fire unless they try to board."

I could not blame Flashpan for his enthusiasm to protect his friends, but I liked the Snow Hawk even better for that humaneness in the face of deadly danger.

The *Amazon* forged along. On either side and well within our range had we been disposed to shoot, two long-boats came in hot pursuit, the muscles of their paddlers rolling in their efforts to pass ahead and cut us off. And they presently succeeded.

WE others kept low, to avoid the occasional arrow that whipped across our deck. Dan, at the tiller, looked for his orders from Kioga as the nearest long-boat set a course that would bring her up against our bow. The danger of hand-to-hand fighting could not be risked now. Kioga gave a sign, which Dan interpreted to mean, "Do what you must."

He put the tiller over hard. The *Amazon* went on another tack. The long-boat, misjudging by a matter of inches, shot squarely across her bow; and the larger craft ran the long-boat under like a log, hurling men and weapons overboard, and passing on to leave them bobbing, yelling, to the surface, in her bubbling wake.

Another long-boat darted forward from the other direction. Again Dan moved his helm; but in maneuvering, the *Amazon* had lost some way, and responded now less quickly. We did not this time cleave the long-boat, but passed instead before it.

Close overside a dozen eager painted Shoni braves rose up to spring upon us, brandishing their knives and tomahawks.

But simultaneous rising of every other man was their undoing. For as our craft came slowly round, her swinging boom struck like a flail against the risen savages, and beat them pell-mell before it, like dominoes set in a line. Pandemonium broke out behind us as we passed, leaving them almost swamped and entirely helpless.

AT the junction of several rivers leading into the far deep-forested interior, Kioga ordered the *Amazon* checked. To one with knowledge of the savage Shoni ways, this was a point where information might be had, as fast as it was signaled forth between the tribes.

No African drum-signal system can compare in its intricacy with that in vogue among the red-skinned tribesmen of Nato'wa. In equatorial jungles the messages are sent forth through air for all to hear. But the Shoni drummers send their warnings and tidings through the water of their river-highways.

Their talking drums are cask-like in shape, with ordinary drum-head tops, but having open bottoms. Five drums of varying size joined together comprise a signaling unit. These units are placed so that their even bottoms are several inches deep in water on creek, stream or river, and the message is beaten out with heavy skin-wrapped sticks, and thus transmitted directly through the water, of itself a splendid conductor.

Within close range, a skillful listener may feel the vibrations with his dipped-in hand or foot. Farther off, the listener must immerse one ear, or preferably both, to take the message—a trick involving some gymnastics, if he would breathe while listening; and it is no uncommon sight, at river-camps, to see one brave alternating with another, lying on his back in shallow water with ears awash, taking in the signals and translating them into speech for the benefit of his feasting fellows—ofttimes a cold but always an informative task, for Shoni gossip-drums are never still.

But at more startling distances at which the distinctive drumming sounds continue audible, some amplifying device must be employed to pick them up. Kioga sought and found what was required for this purpose, a wide strip of thin hard bark, which he rolled into a curving cone, the large end of which he put below the water, the small end into one ear like a hearing-trumpet.

Crouching thus, the while we lingered

close in perfect silence, the Snow-Hawk listened, indicating with a nod that he could hear the signaling. And strange it seemed to all of us that for Kioga the rivers actually spoke. He listened thoughtfully for half an hour, now and then advising us of what he heard.

"The drums speak of white men who dig the earth." That means the miners from the schooner *Pirate*. "They say a hundred Shoni braves have been enslaved to do their digging for them." This squared with rumors Dan had heard before. "Hostile bands from all the villages have put aside their differences to make war upon the whites." Of such, no doubt, were those who had attacked and burned the blockhouse. "Four hundred warriors are heading for a rendezvous on the coast, to lift the scalps of all white men they find."

"They be no fools, those bloody murderers," muttered Flashpan below his breath, the while he hitched his smooth-bore nearer.

Kioga tossed his hearing-cone aside, and swiftly rose. "No time to lose. Come on!"

We followed him, on through the forest and toward the coast, regretfully abandoning the river-boat which had served us so well.

WE achieved the overland march without noteworthy incident. Scott's men cheered our arrival. Once again we were a single party, joined in a strong alliance of hearts and hands. Save by Tokala—whose fate lay with Loalli in the hermit land of M'Anda—our numbers were undiminished since our first landing, and I recall with what a surge of confidence we beheld the new spring sun, now rising on the south horizon, as if to beam a benison upon our fortunes. Alas for all the hopes of such as I!

With nothing to hold us back, and the tide almost at the full, Scott gave the order to knock the blocks from under his new-built ship. Down the slight incline she slowly slid, checked by the ropes on which we pulled, to ease her in. One by one we went aboard from her small-boat to make ourselves familiar with her rude but adequate 'tween-deck appointments.

But not one of our Indians would accompany us. No persuasion could induce a single one to set foot on this craft. Even Kias, whose bravery and courage were far above all criticism, stood on the land, with both Kioga's hands in his, beg-

ging his former chief not to embark upon the vessel. Kias, of course, reflected Kioga, must be torn between two loyalties; for he'd heard gossip of an attachment between Kias and the Wacipi maiden Heladi. And so with a word of hope for Kias' future happiness, he bade his old friend farewell.

IF sailormen may be believed, every ship possesses a soul. And *Bearcat II* proved no exception. She handled well beneath a rag, but proved a trifle cranky when her full suit of heavy skin was unfurled to the wind; perhaps she was a trifle overspurred. But she would serve, and serve with honor, those who put their faith in her. Scott worked her wheel. MacGregor cast a stone up forward as we sounded south and westward for the sheltered harbor which held the *Pirate*.

Against the danger which we hoped would not materialize, our cannon all were packed with powder, wads rammed in, rusty round shot rolled into the muzzles. Below, men fell naturally back into ship-board habits. Beth and her father were quartered aft, the crew amidships, with all the armament stowed forward and provisions centrally located.

Compared with the greater *Pirate*, plank for plank, *Bearcat II* must have appeared a puny war-vessel, save for her really formidable armament—five smaller mobile cannon, two to a side and one to serve as stern chaser, and a fixed whaling-gun up forward, capable of swiveling—to make no mention of our small- and hand-arms, with which each man was well equipped.

We rounded the rocky promontory which hid the *Pirate* from our view. Scott put the spokes hard over and brought her in right handily; and we saw the shadow of our enemy looming dark against the cliffs. She showed no running lights, nor did *Bearcat II*, moving slowly in.

We had not come too soon. The sudden ebb, peculiar to the tides about Nato'wa, set quickly in. The waters drew away, save from that great natural basin in which the two vessels now rested safely, landlocked until the sea came in again.

"Twill be a fair surprise to the *Pirate* when she wakes up in the mornin' to find a fighting ship abeam," said Scott, and ordered all guns rolled to port and laid to bear upon the other ship. "Just to remind 'em we can sting if they attempt to touch us."

Kioga's eyes and listening ears were toward the shore; and in his head were mental images of what must happen when the Shoni warriors descended on the unsuspecting mining-camp. In fancy he already heard the screams of the attacking savages, foreseeing all the hideous aftermath of torture and bloodshed that would follow. He knew what fate was in store for the several pale-skinned women in the camp. Knowing that, although he felt but little sympathy for men who would enslave other men, pity for their women rose in him.

He turned to Captain Scott. "They must be warned."

"They'd shoot you down at sight, man!" Scott exploded. "Ye must be daft to even think of it!"

"They must be warned," Kioga repeated quietly. "I'll take the risk."

"Then you will not go alone," Scott answered loyally. "Some of my men will go along to cover ye. Here, Svenson, Stumpf—"

But there his words were interrupted. A scream, almost too inhuman to have issued from the throat of man, apprised us that it was too late already to do anything to aid those ashore. Warning and massacre had come on them at once. Now we heard the rising shouts and yells of men hard-pressed, the crack of rifles and the lesser sounds of smaller firearms. It was a running battle, judging by the nearing, multiplying volume of those sounds.

Suddenly men burst into view atop the cliffs, now partially illumined by the dawn-glow in the south.

It was a rout, undoubtedly. The whites, known by their garments, showed but one single thought—to scale the cliffs and gain their ship. The greater number won the lower rocky beach; but laggards, four of them, were captured by the savages, knifed and scalped at the brink, and hurled down among the others who preceded them.

A FEW men from the *Pirate* who had been camped in the rock shelter on the shore rushed forth. Perceiving the danger, they ran at once to the *Pirate's* boat, and without waiting for any of their companions, pushed off, intent only upon their own salvation. But before they could pull away, a dozen miners swarmed upon the craft, and in the savage scramble for possession, several were felled before it drew toward the mother ship.

Those who were left behind plunged



The lifelong friends—Kias and Kioga

in and swam—or drowned before they reached their vessel. More would have died had the tide been at the full and sharks on their dread visit to the land. As it was, their loss was great enough, for on the shore the Shoni war-bands swarmed; and in their clutches, too shocked to scream, and apathetic with their terror, three white women faced a fearful destiny.

Upon the *Pirate* all was wild confusion, in the rush to reach that forward gun and put a shot into the assembled body of the savage warriors.

We on *Bearcat II* saw with horror what impended, and cried protest and warning, which went unheard amid the bedlam on the other ship. In the act of putting down a boat, at all hazards to attempt the rescue of those white-skinned women, Kioga was checked by the jarring boom of the *Pirate's* gun.

The shell screamed toward the shore, plumped on the rocky beach and burst. And when the smoke had cleared, Kioga saw that he could do no more to aid the three white women.

The savages, astounded by the shattering destructive shell, retreated from the heap of intermingled dead it left, scattering among the rocks. Our eyes went back once more to the *Pirate*, to witness the final cold-blooded acts of which her company were capable.

Perhaps a dozen of her men still struggled in the water, as they neared the sanctuary of their ship. Some who sought to haul themselves aboard were beaten off. Others near enough to have been saved, were let sink down, no hand raised to give them aid. Such was the example set by white men for those watching savages ashore.

But we alone could comprehend the despicable motive at the heart of it. A

snarling voice from off the *Pirate*, distinctly heard across the water, put it into words: "Don't let 'em board. That many less to share with!"

UNCERTAIN what the Indians could achieve in the way of attack by water, the *Pirate's* men raised her bower and swung their ship a length farther from the shore. Then for the first time those aboard her had a view of *Bearcat II*, whose berth was inconspicuously to one side, within the hook formed by the promontory we had rounded. Men rushed to the *Pirate's* rail.

"What ship is that?" a voice hailed over, sharply.

"*Bearcat II*, Captain Phineas Scott," was Scott's answer.

"Where are you bound?"

"Back to America, come next high tide."

"In that hogshead?" came the derisive question.

"She'll sail—an' that's more'n that mud-burnin' scow of yours'll do," Scott answered furiously.

"Have you provisions, or do you think to eat the sail?"

"We've stocked with food to last two years with no one going hungry," was our Captain's answer—to which he added almost instantly to us: "I've said too much. They can't go back on land; and they spent all their time in huntin' gold, not deer meat. They've nothing in their commissary, and they can't put to sea without it."

"Then let 'em rot here in Nato'wal!" Dan cut in angrily.

"Aye, but they'll not be content to rot—not when we boast how rich we are in what they lack. Aye, I've said too much."

A voice was hailing from across the water. "We've got a bit of gold below. We might pay well for half of them provisions."

"I knew it!" muttered Scott, below his breath, and then in answer bellowing: "Aye, that ye might, if we would sell."

"And you won't sell, will you?" The question came heavy with sarcasm.

"Nary a poond to the likes o' you!" cried back MacGregor, Scott's associate, unable longer to contain himself.

"You'll wish you had before we're through!"

"Quick, Mac," Scott interrupted in a quiet voice. "See the decks are cleared. Brace them iron plates we salvaged from the *Bearcat* up against the bulwarks."

"Aye, sir," MacGregor answered quickly, sobered by the tone.

"Svenson! Stand by your whale-gun!"

"Codd! Stand by with Flashpan at the portside cannon."

"You, Kirk, Dan, John La Salle, hark now!" We stood silent, waiting on his words. "Take orders from Kioga, who will direct matters on the deck. I'll work the ship as need be." He paused in these swift instructions to send a word of warning toward the *Pirate*.

"Don't bark at me, ye friend-killing swine! We'll give back more than we receive."

Derisive laughter from the *Pirate*. "A good bluff, skipper, we'll call it." There was the flash of binoculars on the other craft, and then came the voice again: "Who is the handsome wench beside ye, Captain?"

I saw Kioga's eyes flash with the glint of cold gray steel.

Scott turned to see Beth standing near. "Below, Miss Beth," he told her. "Remain there. Your service may be needed, if it comes to fightin'."

And then commands broke swiftly from Scott.

"They're coming round to hold their bow gun on us. You are to fire when you like, Flashpan. Bring down her foremast if you can. You, Svenson, let them have it when she comes to lie bow on; and if you put their gun out of action, so much the better. I do not know what other arms she carries. Try to cripple her, but not to sink her unless you must." A ship was something living to Captain Scott, not to be destroyed except in last emergency. "Above all else, oppose their boarding. That's all from me. Kioga is in charge from this time on. There's a fairish breeze which ought to freshen. I'll work the ship."

THE *Pirate* was slowly swinging. Flashpan crouched by his gun, carefully laid and elevated, awaiting the instant when the *Pirate's* foremast should almost cross the gun's line of trajectory. That instant came. Flashpan worked the flinten lock, which showered sparks into a little pan before the touch-hole. The gun roared with a belch of smoke and flame, and a recoil that shook our timbers.

From where I stood, I clearly saw the dark sphere hurtling. The little miner's aim was good, all crudities of his weapon considered. The ball actually did strike the foremast, too much to the

side to bring it down, though damaging it severely, and hurling deadly splinters like shrapnel in all directions.

Three men went down as if machine-gunned, and dragged themselves to shelter. The others on the *Pirate*, all unprepared for such a greeting, scurried suddenly for cover.

Came then the crisper answer of the *Pirate's* forward gun. A shell screamed through our crude hide sail and burst beyond, fragments scattering like a fiery hail upon our decks.

On land, enthralled by sight of this, to them, astonishing engagement, the native Shoni redmen beheld with wonder this first combat of white men's ships about Nato'wan waters.

FROM the *Pirate* came the voice of command. We heard the rattle of chains as she took up her claws. We had our own hooks already in, in order to be ready for her when she came. Until her auxiliary motor started, we held a slight advantage in being on the move, with all sail up. But what would happen when her screw began to turn?

Some such thought was also in the minds of Flashpan and the rest, who waited for the moment when we should pass the *Pirate* to let her have our second gun. We passed to starboard as she faced us, and Flashpan fixed his eye and sights upon her hull, aft near the waterline. I heard him muttering to himself repeatedly. "Hit 'er in the engynes, or miss and blast the bloomin' rudder off!"

He pulled the trigger actuating his flint. Sparks flew, but no explosion followed. Flashpan worked the flint-lock madly, while from the *Pirate*, slowly passing, hidden rifle-men sniped at him, their bullets ping-ing fiercely from the iron shield that sheltered him. The gun went off at last, but unexpectedly. The shot hurled up a spout behind the enemy which doused her cursing helmsman but did no other damage.

Both of our port guns were now discharged, and it takes time to charge, load and prime an old-type cannon such as we must use, while under fire. Scott saw this state of things at once and helmed to come about, so that we might discharge our starboard guns into the *Pirate's* sides, if possible before her auxiliary went to work.

But halfway through the maneuver, he heard the motor cough and stutter, then settle down into a steady drone of power.

We noted with a grim satisfaction that there was no further derision from the *Pirate*. She and her men all knew that they were in a fight, dependent on their utmost efforts to avert disaster, and already wounded in their foremast, which several men were now repairing hastily.

None the less the motor gave her great advantage over us, who were dependent on what wind there was in order to maneuver, and praying more would blow into our sails. Responding to her helm, the *Pirate* slowly turned and brought her gun again to bear.

Scott brought our stern around, so that we faced her bows-on, presenting thus the narrowest possible target.

Now the *Pirate* fired again, and on the echo our craft shivered like an arrowed deer. The shell had burst two feet before our cutwater. The enemy gunner was reloading.

The *Pirate* now appeared to have her motor in reverse, to hold her stance so that another shot might find us in a relatively unchanged position for a truer shot. But Scott was equal to the situation, and came up strongly with the wind, so that the *Pirate's* third shot sang above our heads as had the first, and burst behind us.

NOW Svenson had a good bead on the other ship and fired one of the whaling bombs, which caught the *Pirate* just below her sprit and severed the anchor from the chain, to drop into the depths. *Bearcat II* ranged up close now, and our two port cannon, reloaded in the meantime, roared loudly.

Close and distinct there was the crash and rend of smashing timbers. This time the *Pirate* had sustained two heavy blows, unluckily above the waterline.

But now *Bearcat II* lurched to the crash of an exploding shell. Gazing aft, I saw a suck of water entering us, and called the fact to Scott, who put the spokes over swiftly, threw her on the other tack, thus elevating her dangerous open wound sufficiently to be up out of water.

Three of our men swung swiftly out on ropes, to nail spare planks across the opening. This operation necessitated that *Bearcat II* be held upon her course. And since the bay was not a quarter of a mile in width at any point, her way must be reduced by taking in some sail, else she would bring up on the rocks before repairs were made.

In this unpleasant case the *Pirate* gave



us chase and swiftly overtook us, roving up along our lower bulwark, secure from momentary danger, since our cannon could not now be elevated high enough to hurl their balls into her. And the *Pirate* swiftly took advantage, to put a shell square amidships, the first direct hit made upon the deck of either craft. I saw a stain of red appear on John La Salle's sleeve; and Flashpan's jaw bled from a wound dealt by a flying splinter. The *Pirate*, by virtue of her extra power, seemed in a fair way of settling us.

But luck held, for the time. Repairs effected, Scott swung her full around, had all sail hauled up again, and while she hesitated just before her skins filled up, our starboard guns bore full upon the *Pirate's* quarter. Like thunder they discharged, the double echo rolling from the cliffs and back among the forested hills.

This time we had dealt a telling blow, betrayed by the crash of steel and the sudden silence of the *Pirate's* muttering machinery. Her power plant was killed. Now we held the advantage, since, counting on her engine for all power, the *Pirate* had not a rag of canvas out to catch the wind. Still moving forward, she answered but slowly to her rudder, and being dangerously near the rocks to start with, was on them in a moment, gently but firmly.

Now had we been bent on vengeance, we might have come alongside and given her our broadsides at pleasure. But seeing her stopped by the situation,

Scott crowded sail and headed for the open sea, now accessible through the channel in the reefs, thanks to the rising tide and freshening offshore wind.

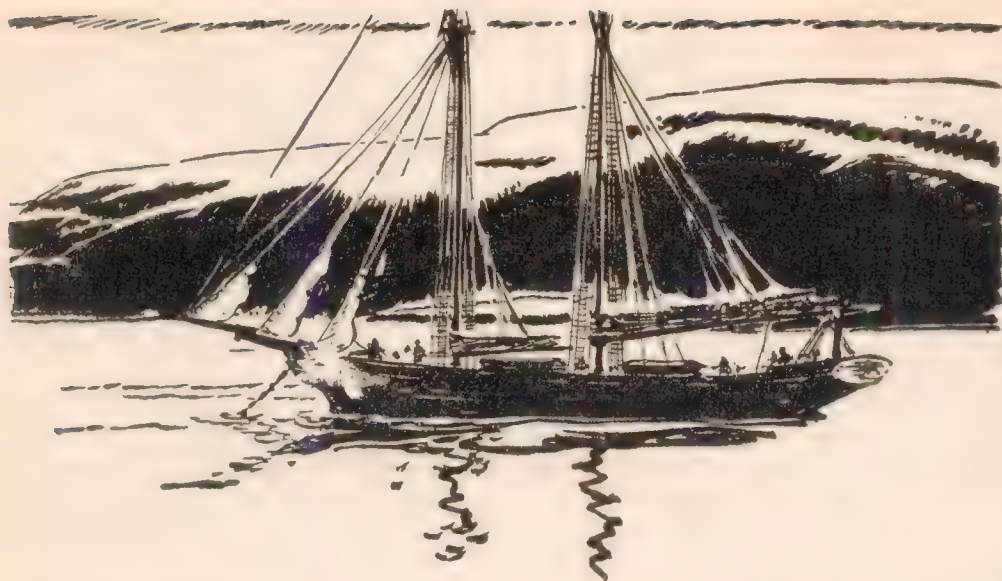
The *Pirate* and the mainland of Nato'wa fell astern. At long last we were on our way out to the open sea, the other ship a threat no longer, so we hoped.

But Scott in glancing back for one last sight of her, was moved to swear. "By God, she's off the rocks again! The tide did that. They've got sail upon her, and she's comin' like Halley's comet. Now, lads, it is a race. Trim ship and shift them iron plates a bit aft, and two guns with them. She acts a little cranky with the weight as is. . . . Aye, now, that's better; feel her surge! Now they'll see how a hogshead can run when rightly handled!"

It was a satisfying leap the vessel gave, urged by increasing winds. Yellow foam made song below her counter. With all strings pulling she was no lazy sailer. It was her rugged lines and curving swell, designed to cope with ice-conditions we would have to meet, which gave advantage to our black pursuer, more than the almost double area of canvas which the *Pirate* carried. And slowly she closed up the gap between us.

A puff of smoke came from her gun. What with the flap of sail and song of wind in rigging, we hardly heard it speak. But in our wake, three hundred yards behind, the shell threw foam aloft. At intervals the *Pirate* sought our range, which each time was little shorter, until a sixth shell struck only a hundred feet away on a line with the wheel to which Scott clung.

From that time on the firing ceased.



Scott explained simply: "Without our knowledge of the channel we could not have come this far. Since we know the way, they're followin', hoping to take us when we make the open water. If they sink us, they'll starve to death. If they turn back, as they dare not, the Shoni, will slit their throats." Scott laughed aloud. "We are at liberty to fire. They are not, for reasons stated. We have five guns and they have one that's equal to all of ours. She's creepin' up. Hi, Flashpan, let me see your marksmanship. Put me a ball upon the *Pirate*."

"Exac'ly whar upon her?" demanded Flashpan.

"Amidships," answered Scott, "where that rascal stands with glasses, watchin' us."

"And shall I hit or graze him?"

Laughter came in Scott's voice again. "Just knock the glasses from his hands."

Flashpan chuckled in his throat and took a long sight, elevating, depressing, elevating yet again. He fired finally and through a wreath of smoke observed the other ship. He saw men on her stare, then run to cover, all save him who stood with glasses trained. Bolder than the others, the man leaped suddenly aside. Where he had stood a great hole suddenly appeared.

No one was more astounded at the lucky shot than Flashpan himself, who saw the hit with falling jaw. But he was quickly nonchalant again, and feigned disgust. "Ah, bah! Another miss—he's still got the glasses in his hand. Me eyes aint whut they used to be!"

Scott roared in high good humor, which changed to consternation as he saw our

The *Pirate*, doubtless fearful of the worst from such uncanny gunnery, was crowding sail. The enemy meant to close, and drew up quickly.

sail slashed twenty feet by a shell that cracked beyond the bow. The *Pirate* doubtless fearful of the worst from such uncanny gunnery, was crowding sail, intent on silencing us before we put her under water. The enemy meant to close, and drew up quickly, sending shells as fast as they could load and fire.

"All cannon to the starboard!" Kioga ordered crisply, and suiting action to the words, rolled one by main strength to the bulwark. "Aim low and fire at the waterline!" Almost as one the guns exploded and smoke enveloped us. We heard loud yells across the brine, yells of fury and of consternation. But on our own deck there was silence, filled with horror.

Death stalked among us. One of our guns had burst. MacGregor lay outstretched and still. Tom Codd hung limply on the wrecked barrel. Kioga's face was almost black with powder-smoke. One of Flashpan's long moustaches had burned completely off, and the other was singed to half its former length. Dan La Salle had neither brows nor lashes left.

But evidently the *Pirate* was now taking water. Her speed had carried her ahead of us so that her gun was out of action, though rifle-fire rattled against our makeshift battle-plates.

One by one our guns went off. The range was close. The *Pirate's* wheel was shot away whole, spinning high in air, her rudder wild. Her fractured foremast

topped, fouling all her forward gear, her gun included. Her crew had only one alternative. They quickly glimpsed it, as did we, who made our preparations to receive them when they sought to board.

Theirs would be the wild assault of desperation, for the *Pirate* gave all indications of having taken a mortal wound. The duel of the gunners had resolved into the certainty of closer combat. To check them if we could, we hurled by hand the time-bombs originally intended to kill whales.

Svenson threw up his hands and fell, a bullet through his forehead. Close-quarter fighting would destroy all that superior gunnery had achieved. But we could not avoid it now. The *Pirate's* standing sails were set to throw her hard against us, and on her rail swarmed those who had survived our fire.

ONE more broadside, our last for lack of powder, hulled the *Pirate* as she ground against *Bearcat II*. Her crew came over, rifles swinging. Kioga and his deck-gang met them with keen lances, sharp flensing-knives and deadly cutting spades, all whaling implements salvaged from the first *Bearcat*.

I saw the black boy Grant die like a hero, having done for three men with as many thrusts. I saw poor Flashpan hurled like a pitiable scarecrow against the mast, round which he curled inertly. Side by side with Dan and Kioga, La Salle the elder was valiantly fighting with a shining courage until a gun-butt crushed him down in defense of his own. All this I saw, as through a reddish mist, and with the fascination of the terrible, from which I could scarce take my eyes to lay about me with my own smoothbore.

The ships were linked together bow to bow, like two fighting craft of old, and members of the *Pirate's* crew were fouling up the ropes to keep them so, until by force of numbers they should overwhelm and take us. But since they had elected a prow-to-prow connection, their men could come aboard us only at that single point, because the sterns and 'midships of the craft were thereby forced apart. Upon those interlocking bows would be decided our fate, and that of Beth La Salle.

I glimpsed the girl, emerging from below. She paused above John Ford La Salle, and with a little moan sank to her knees beside her father. But courage blazed in her. The dead could not be

aided. The living needed her. She rose and came to Flashpan, and with a strength born of the moment's need, picked his slight form up and carried him aft near the gun.

Beth reappeared, and this time came to me when I lay helpless from the blow of a gun-butt. A dash of water from a bucket which she bore helped to revive me. I caught a hard and painful breath, and struggled to my knees.

Beth pressed a knife into my hands. Her voice was quiet, but vibrating with deep urgency. "Go forward. Try to cut the ropes that hold the ships together. I'll turn the stern gun round. Flashpan says there is a charge still in it. Be ready. When I give the signal, tell our men to drop down flat behind the cover of the deck-house!"

I reached the forward cabin-house; and there again became assailed with weakness and went to my knees, my muscles caving under me. Forward at the prow Kioga, Dan and Scott still held their own by virtue of the fact that only one or two could come against them at a time. But Stumpf was missing.

From the shrouds, high in the broken rigging of the *Pirate*, came the intermittent fire of a rifleman. And presently Dan, struck in one arm, must wield his clubbed gun with the other. Again the sniper aimed and fired.

Suddenly, from aft on *Bearcat II* came a simultaneous fire.

The sniper's head snapped back, slewed round grotesquely on his neck. His cap fell to the *Pirate's* deck, and presently the owner toppled almost full upon it.

I threw a glance behind. Flashpan had risen to his elbows to shoot, and now, hurt by the hard recoil of his gun, slumped back again.

Scott fell, his heart still willing, but his aging body failing him. Kioga stood alone, the shirt ripped from his back, his cable muscles rolling with his movements. Skulking in the background, Ifuago the little rat-eyed Asiatic, waited for the Snow Hawk's fall to leap and slip a knife in him. His thin blade glittered, ready to do murder.

NOW, however, I was almost myself again, and had seized the lance which Dan had dropped.

Sneaking round to take Kioga from behind, Ifuago leaped with weasel quickness. It was my chance. I raised the lance, took aim and let Ifuago have it.

Straight through his back it would

have plunged, had not *Bearcat II* lurched suddenly under us. Ifuago had escaped the lance to meet another end, more fitted to his deserts. The jar dislodged him down between the vessels, grinding together at the bows. Ifuago screamed. The sound of grating paused a moment, as if a mat had come between the ships, and then began again. Released, the body of Ifuago struck the water, sinking instantly.

That sudden lurch and fall of the *Bearcat's* bow disconcerted the enemy, giving momentary advantage to Kioga. He threw them off, glimpsed me, and dimly saw Flashpan waving and yelling from astern. I shouted what I knew Flashpan would be trying to make heard:

"Drop down! Drop down—behind the deck-house!"

Kioga understood at once and dived for cover, I beside him. The *Pirate's* crew cheered with the hope of final victory and flocked aboard us in full force. The echo of their triumph had not died when Flashpan let his last shot go. Annihilation went before that blast.

Small bits of chain and scrap, a veritable hail of our crude shrapnel passed above our heads. The men from on the *Pirate* melted like lead soldiers. Not one survived that final fire. The battle ended on our own decks.

All suddenly became funereally still. We were victorious—but at what price!

ABOARD the *Bearcat* five good men and good friends had died, and one was missing. All the rest bore wounds. Svenson, whaler's gunner; Washington Madison Grant, the valiant black boy; MacGregor, our lovable Scottish smith. Tom Codd still hung across the burst gun; all lay still just where death had come to greet them. Now, with the crisis past, Beth La Salle knelt and mourned silently beside her fallen father, with Dan himself, sore wounded, attempting to assuage her grief.

Kioga, who had borne the brunt of that last fighting forward, miraculously had taken but slight wounds—a tribute to his amazing quickness and agility. Scott, beneath the Snow Hawk's ministrations, was coming round. Otto Stumpf, that lion-hearted German, was nowhere to be seen.

I still could get around, and moved to Flashpan's side, to find him semi-conscious, grimed with powder-smoke. His dog had found a way up from below, to rest his muzzle on the master's breast

and softly whine. Flashpan was speaking weakly. "Placer—whar be ye, monk?"

From far aloft there came a chattering cry. Down through the ropes and shrouds a spidery figure plunged. Placer, too, had a minor battle-wound in one black little hand.

There was small time to patch him up. Victorious against the *Pirate* and her crew, *Bearcat II* now capitulated to the sea. That crash of ships together at the bow had damaged her severely. I ran below to find five feet of water in her hold, the level rising rapidly.

I CALLED this news to Kioga, who, with Scott, now able to stand on his feet, surveyed the situation. "She'll founder, sure," Scott said. "She's fillin' fast. On deck, my lads! Take to the *Pirate*. At least she's got a boat that isn't kindling like our own."

In haste we worked to bear our wounded forward where the ships were still entangled bow to bow. Well for us now that I had not succeeded in their separation. It was a feat to get those still alive from one ship to the other, for now our vessel's stern rail was awash and visibly submerging. What with an added list to port, the deck was at an ever-steepening slant.

Air blew from the hawse-hole with a hoarse and bubbling sound. It was *Bearcat II* sounding her death-rattle. One of her guns escaped, to roll and crash in wild career into the sea, carrying away part of her rail. Tom Codd was draped across that gun and went down with it. As if endowed with sentient fury, the other cannon followed, almost as one, running down the dead.

Kioga leaped upon the doomed craft's deck, intent on saving La Salle's body from sinking with her. Then all at once the snarl of cordage parted. *Bearcat II* sank beneath her weight of gravel ballast. With her went her dead. And Beth cried out, for in the whirlpool on that swirling surface, the Snow Hawk spun a moment and was sucked under too.

Frozen by the suddenness of this chain of disasters, capped with Kioga's disappearance, we stared down almost in paralysis; then suddenly his head appeared, tossing the heavy wet thatch back from his eyes. We threw a rope. He gripped it and was hauled aboard. But of La Salle the elder and those others who had gone down with *Bearcat II*, we saw no more.

Why the *Pirate* had not sunk already was a mystery. We did not wait to clear her littered decks, but went immediately aft to where we had inflicted greatest damage on the *Pirate's* hull. Advancing armed, we heard the sound of stertorous grunting and the rasping of a saw—and by lantern-light we glimpsed the sweating form of Otto Stumpf.

With planks and canvas, he had stopped the shot-holes below the water-line, working while the *Pirate* had been dragged down at the bow—and consequently raised astern—by the sinking *Bearcat II*.

Thanks solely to Stumpf's foresight, we still had a floating ship beneath us. Presently below, we got her pumps in action, made fair repairs, and ascertained that none of the crew remained to threaten us. Then we went aloft to clear the littered decks and give the dead all decent burial overside.

At dawn the *Pirate* sailed from Nato'wa, leaving the last rock reef-tower astern in four hours. Three days passed before we first encountered solid ice-fields; but from then on, each day brought crises which we met and overcame, more by the grace of God than our own strength.

But the *Pirate* was not destined for destruction by the ice. She limped out of the pack weeks later, scarred and wounded by the floes, but still intact. Of water we had plenty. But her small store of provisions, doled out in daily smaller rations, had barely sustained our lives. Our strength grew less and less. When no food remained, one seal, killed by Kioga from the *Pirate's* boat, was all we shared to eat.

Land was sighted in the south by men so far gone in hunger that they dared not trust their senses. Scott calculated that it was the north coast of Siberia, and steered the *Pirate* east and south on that assumption. According to the final entry in my journal before I lost my senses, we passed between the Diomedes near Bering Strait in mid-July. We were walking skeletons, all but dead of hunger, drifting aboard a leaking ship that soon would founder for lack of hands to man the pumps.

CHAPTER XX

FORWARD on the *Pirate*, Captain Scott stood next to Kioga, staring out across the water with eyes that played strange tricks upon them. Through the

mists Scott had thought he saw the outlines of another ship, and asked Kioga to confirm his vision.

"She looked to be right dead ahead," he whispered huskily. "I could have sworn. Aye! There she is again!" His hand shook, pointing. Kioga followed it, and in the mists he too made out the vague dim outlines of a vessel far ahead. Before he could affirm his agreement, she had vanished and the mists were thicker.

The *Pirate* held her course, her wheel lashed in position. An hour passed. The vessel long since must have cut across the other's course, if she had truly been a ship, and not the figment of their own imagination. They watched on either side and suddenly, abeam, Kioga saw a distant gleaming broadside through the fog, and called for Scott to verify him. But Scott could not sustain him nor deny. "The mist is like a curtain," the Captain murmured. The minutes passed.

"Now! There!" cried Kioga suddenly, pointing toward the north, astern, whence they were sailing.

"Aye, thanks to God; I see her clearly cutting through our wake! But now she's gone again." A little later Scott began to chuckle in his beard.

Kioga eyed him sharply. "Why are you laughing, man?"

"Because she is abeam, now, to the west of us!" Scott answered in a voice that had begun to rise a little. Kioga wheeled to peer out through the fog. "My eyes are sharp, but I don't sight her," he said.

Scott nodded heavily, but he had controlled himself again. "Nor do I, friend. It is the hunger working at our wits. There was no ship out there at all."

WITH only Kioga now able to get around at all, there was no possibility of working the ship. Nor did Kioga wish to leave a group, any one of whom might lose his mind and perpetrate some dreaded act. As for myself, I had short rational flashes, but for the rest I must have been a trial to the others, babbling and raving other-times. . . . In a moment of clearness I saw Kioga moving toward the port bow, to strain his gaze out through the fog. I could not see above the bulwark. But in my delirium I seemed to hear a distant hail.

"Ahoy on board that schooner! Who are you?"

Kioga answered, but even I could not hear, much less that ghost-voice from the distance. Another distant hail.

KIOGA OF THE UNKNOWN LAND

"Aho-oy, aboard the *Pirate*! Come about, or I'll put a shot into you!"

What mockery that was—come about, with not a man aboard who could handle rope or wheel! Again Kioga's shout was but a whisper.

I seemed to hear a gun explode, and thought it was the one near which Kioga crouched. A shell wailed over and struck the sea beyond us. The hailing voice again. "We've warned you. *Will you come about?*"

I seemed to hear the sound of bells. Came another boom. I struggled to my feet to see what was happening—only to collapse again, unconscious.

SO this still silent dark was the Beyond. . . . In our crossing from the world of life, we must have come together in a company, bound for a common destination; for I could now hear Flashpan's voice, raised up in a cracked but happy song—a very earthly song, it seemed to me, sung to the tunes of a banjo whose sour notes would never pass in any proper heaven.

I caught still other sounds, the *jang-a-ling* of bells, the thrum of powerful machinery as in response. Then suddenly, assailing me with wondrous effect, the rich aroma of coffee and the scent of ham and eggs, awoke me from that heaven of my own imagination to the world of living men—a very interesting world.

I awoke to hear the story of our rescue out of Flashpan's mouth: "The *Pirate* was goin' down, d'ye see, when what shoots into sight but a fine white lifeboat, six men at th' oars. The boat gits to us jest in time, like in the story-books, b'gosh! The mate says, kinda low: 'Migod, migod! These aint the folk who stole this ship. They're starvin'! Look at 'em!'

"They picked us up, even to my monk and hound, and tuk us on their ship."

"What ship?" I interrupted.

"One o' th' Coast Guard boats. She—"

A voice interrupted from the doorway. I saw Beth standing there, a steaming tray in hand. Behind her in the passage loomed the mighty shoulders of the Snow Hawk. Scott was there, all smiles and ruddiness again; so was Stumpf, his moon-like face aglow; Dan grinned at me and all came in until the little room was crowded with friends and good will.

While I ate, they told me news of what had transpired in the world we came from. Shanghai had fallen. Japan was at

China's throat. Amelia Earhart had been long missing and unheard-from in this same Pacific, far in the south. A mighty monarch had given up his throne to marry an American.

And as the news was told, Kioga looked out through a porthole toward the north, Beth standing at his side.

The hour when the crew had taken us aboard had added *finis* to the great adventure of Nato'wa. They faced a different kind of personal adventure, but their happiness, like my own, was of the quiet kind, tinged by the memory of tragedy, of friends and loved ones never to be seen again. And as they gazed in silence northward, I did not need a crystal gazing-ball to divine their thoughts.

Up there, on that last continent of vast adventure, another king was only taking up his duties. They wondered what was the destiny of Tokala—boy-ruler of the T'emaho, and master of all M'Anda.

After some further talk in the secure and comfortable cabin, they all departed, Beth and Kioga arm in arm. Beside me Flashpan picked up the banjo belonging to one of the crew and stroked out chords from the Lohengrin Wedding March. I turned to him in some surprise. "A little premature for that, isn't it?"

"Pshaw!" said Flashpan laconically, stroking the head of his dog. "Not premature. Late. I forgot to tell ye, the Captain married them this mornin'. Dan was best man; but out of deference to me bravery and service to the bride and groom,"—here Flashpan struck an attitude of pride,—"I held the ring."

Suddenly, through the porthole, I saw a little face peer in. Placer, Flashpan's pet rhesus, had just had floury adventure in the ship's pantry forward. Except for that, I could have sworn the human little rascal winked.



THE END.



Strange

By TRACY

I'VE been waiting thirty years for the finish of this episode, and that's a long time to have a worry kicking around in the unforgetting part of your mind. Indirectly, it was Jack London who was the cause of all my worry—but years later when I met him, and told him the story he exclaimed: "Hell's bother, that's got my tale backed off the map!"

I had been a member of the party for two weeks before I knew they had other intentions than the sporting ones they had advanced when they extended me the invitation to join them on the cruise. As they had outlined the trip to me, we were to journey down the Atlantic coast of South America, visiting interesting points, fishing and hunting as needs or opportunity arose, round the Horn and come up on the Pacific side to where the Panama canal was being dug.

There were five of us whites in the party aboard a thirty-ton schooner that was manned by a crew of five West Indian negroes. From the start the trip proved interesting, even more so than I had anticipated. Off the coast of Nicaragua we fished for turtles, spearing some of them, and others we hauled in with nets; and if you think that is not excitement enough to tickle the most blasé, just try it once.

We lost one of our crew there on the turtle breeding-grounds. We had hauled a huge critter aboard in the net—it would easily have gone six hundred pounds—and were untangling it. Suddenly it rolled clear, and one of the negroes made a grab for a flipper, slipped and crashed into the turtle. As he hit, the turtle's leg, or flipper, closed down, pinning the leg of the unfortunate man. The monster finished its roll, struck the

low side of the boat and plunged overboard, carrying the struggling negro down with it. Down through the clear blue water we could see the turtle sink like a plummet, its victim struggling and kicking to no avail. They settled down on a coral reef thirty or forty feet below the surface. Nothing we did seemed to disturb the huge creature, and there the poor sailor drowned; when we finally sailed away, the turtle still lay there atop the submerged reef; and fish were tearing at the dead man's body.

We landed at various points on the coast and hunted deer and tapir, shot manatee in the lagoons near the mouths of rivers, and shot sharks that swarmed voraciously around our boat when we cut up smaller fish and threw them overboard. Shark-fishing is not dull sport!

Just when I was enjoying myself to the limit they sprung their little joker. One of the party had at one time worked in a gold-mine in South America. According to his story, two hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of concentrates were brought down to the railhead each month for shipment to the United States. These rich concentrates were carried from the mines back in the hills, on pack-mules, with only one armed guard, the natives who acted as packers carrying only their usual machetes.

Their proposition as presented to me was that we anchor the schooner in a small deserted cove on the coast, go inland and capture the pack-train, bring it out overland through the bush to the boat, and sail away, each man fifty thousand dollars the richer.

Simple; and as they outlined it, fool-proof. I had no desire to get mixed up in any such crazy scheme and argued against it until I realized that it was either join them or probably have an accident that would prove fatal to me. Perforce I pretended to agree to join.

When several men are confined to such small space as a thirty-ton sailing schooner, they have to be above the average if

REAL EX-

Duel

RICHARDSON

In this department readers and writers meet to tell true stories of their own most memorable hours. (For details of our Real Experience contest, see page 3.) First a well-known soldier of fortune tells of a fantastic episode which caused Jack London to exclaim: "That's got my tale backed off the map."

they don't quarrel. This gang was no exception. There was jealousy between the leader of the expedition and the man who had worked in the mines. And with the idea of breaking up the gang in time, I methodically set out to foster this ill feeling, by sowing seeds of distrust. My luck in this direction was better than I ever expected, and led to the end that has puzzled me for thirty years.

We had been two months aboard the schooner when things finally came to the breaking-point. Several times the two leaders had come to blows, and it was with difficulty that they were restrained from shooting it out on the boat, to the great danger of everyone aboard. At last I worked it to the point where they came to me to arbitrate, each of them claiming that nothing would satisfy him except a chance to kill the other. A short time before, I had read Jack London's book wherein he described a strange duel on an island in the South Seas. He had two of his characters armed with rifles hunting one another down in a coconut grove, like wild beasts of the jungle. A thing like that took more nerve than I thought either of them had, but, to my surprise, they jumped at my solution of their troubles; each of them seemed confident he would emerge victor.

WE found a location that was perfect for such a fantastic affair; an island, a short way up the mouth of a wide river, about five acres in extent and covered with a dense tropical jungle growth, matted together with vines until it was impossible to see ten feet ahead. A quarter-mile of swift water flowed on either side of the island, and that water was alive with sharks, alligators and barracuda. No chance for them to escape.

We anchored the schooner at a point above the island where we would have a perfect view of everything except what was concealed by the jungle growth.

We landed the two desperate men on the island, one at either end, each armed

with rifle, pistol, machete and a hundred rounds of ammunition. The rules of the combat were simple: they were to hunt one another down, any way they wanted to, nothing barred. The man bringing the other's firearms to the beach would be taken off, and we would sail away.

The dank undergrowth closed behind them, and we returned to the boat to watch and listen for the outcome of this barbaric duel. We still had our doubts as to their going through with it, and my mind was in anything but a pleasant state as I thought of the mess I had stirred up. A heavy feeling of depression settled down on the boat. Here were two men with whom we had been closely associated for over two months, hunting one another down like beasts, a hunting that could only end with the death of one or both of them. At that moment I cursed Jack London and all his wild imaginative ideas.

An hour passed, two hours, and the silence of death held over the island. Suddenly, three hours after their landing, firing burst on our tensely waiting ears—shots deadened by jungle growth, bouncing back and forth from tree to tree until it was impossible to locate the spot whence they came. Scattered shots at first, then a regular fusillade that died away again to a few scattered shots. For fifteen minutes perhaps the firing lasted, although it seemed hours to us.

In vain we waited for the victor to appear, and finally concluded that they had either had no luck, or had killed each other. Just before sundown there came another short burst of firing, about a dozen shots this time; then again silence settled down over the wilderness, and the negro cook called us to chow. We ate perfunctorily for our thoughts were out there in the jungle.

All during the night we kept watch, turn and turn about. No one appeared, and no sound came to our ears to indicate that there was life on the island. All during the following day and night we watched and waited, without signs; and the morning of the third day found us ready to investigate the island to find out

PERIENCES

the results of the duel. Were they both dead? Both killed in this weird combat? Perhaps they lay wounded or dying there in the bush. We had to find out.

First we made a circuit of the island in a rowboat. Then we landed, leaving one of the crew on guard. We pushed our way into the undergrowth. At first we could follow the trail, marked by vines and brush that had been cut with the machete; then these signs disappeared, indicating they had started the real stalk, on hands and knees perhaps, or crawling flat on their bellies like a beast of prey stalking its innocent victim. We came to a spot where we found several empty shells; we went a ways farther on and found another batch of empty casings, showing where at least one of the contestants had made his stand against his implacable foe. But that was all.

For two days we searched the island. We searched the mainland, everywhere, but not a sign except those empty cartridge-cases. No bodies, no bones, no pieces of torn clothing or even a sign of their guns. Nothing to show what had become of the two desperate men who had entered the jungle with the object of exterminating each other. If they had killed each other and wild animals had eaten their bodies, there would still have been some signs, for they could not eat the bones or guns, and there should have been rags from their clothing. We searched for signs of tree-cuttings that would tell of their having made a raft, but at no place could we find such a sign. We knew it was impossible for any human to swim the river, and a close search of both shores failed to reveal any signs of any one landing there. Gone, that was all, without a sign to tell how or why.

We stayed there for five days, waiting, searching, wondering—to no end. Finally we pulled up anchor and sailed away with heavy gloom over the boat. But for me at any rate there was one ray of sunshine: there would be no robbing of the mine's pack-train, as the only men who knew the details were gone.

We finished our trip around the Horn, up through the Pacific. I spent the next several years in Mexico, Central America and South America; always I kept my eyes open and asked questions; but to my knowledge, no human has ever set eyes on those two men since the time the jungle fastness closed on them as they went in to duel to the death; nor have I ever been able to figure out a probable solution. It's a story without an ending.

Flight in

A British major in the Turkish service runs off with the Egyptian Khedive's destined favorite—and marries her in spite of hell and high water.

IT was the most solemn night of the whole Mohammedan year, the last night of the month of Ramazan. The Mosque of Mohammed Ali in Cairo was thronged with men, prostrating themselves and muttering the prayers of the Koran, making intercession to the Prophet to save them from death. In accordance with immemorial custom, the Khedive of Egypt, with his cabinet ministers, officers of state, and all his male attendants was present in the great mosque, making his yearly intercession.

The Egyptian moon shed a soft dim light over the high stone-walled garden of the Khedivial Palace, as the slight figure of a budding girl in her teens moved gracefully from behind a cypress tree and paused, expectantly waiting. She was the Hanoum—the Lady Diane Zoe, Egyptian beauty and the Khedive's favorite dancer, in whose veins flowed the blood of the Palaeologi, the Greek-Byzantine family which had occupied the Imperial Throne of Byzantium during the four hundred years previous to the Ottoman-Turkish conquest in 1453. Her little head poised as if listening, she stood between the fountains and the cypress trees, nervously fingering her Rosary of Islam with its ninety-nine precious beads, each bead dedicated to one of the Ninety-nine Most Beautiful Names of God.

In the distance was heard the faint chugging of a motorcar approaching the palace grounds. Then silence. Then cautious footsteps outside the great wall. And a low whistle. Diane Zoe stiffened, glanced behind her, then placed a gold-slippered foot on the thick vines, lithely climbed up and leaped down on the other side into the welcoming arms of a young man in the uniform of an officer of the Turkish Army. Then the big Mercedes car sped away through the palms. . . .

The Lady Diane Zoe's absence and flight were discovered before midnight. The palace chamberlain and his staff spent a busy and tireless night; all Cairo was searched by the police; but no trace was found of the missing princess.

the Desert

By MAJOR
S. L. GLENISTER

But the secret service had a clue: A young Britisher, holding the rank of *bimbashi*, or major, in the Turkish Army, who had been sojourning for a couple of weeks in Cairo, was missing from Shepherd's Hotel; his room had not been slept in, and his belongings were still there. And this young Britisher had brought a long, sleek Mercedes to Cairo with him; it was the fastest car in Egypt in 1913. Not only was the Britisher missing but his car also.

Inquiry at the British Consulate elicited the fact that the young man, a Major Glenister, was a free-lance journalist and soldier of fortune, who had gone to Turkey the previous year to cover the Balkan War and incidentally, on account of his technical knowledge, had been offered and had accepted a commission as a major in the Sultan's services, where he had had charge of the transportation of the Adrianople Division of the Turkish Army. He had been cooped up in Adrianople during the siege, and had afterward come to Cairo on leave to recuperate.

Once the news of the elopement became public, tongues wagged actively for the proverbial nine days at Shepherd's and the other smart hotels of Cairo. Gossip intimated that the Major had first met the famous beauty returning by camel cavalcade from a trip to the desert; that another meeting between the two took place at the Khedivial Ball, held annually in the height of the Cairo season, and attended by all the diplomatic and military officials and their wives and daughters, by Egyptian Government officials, and by the foreign socialites of the Egyptian capital. And gossip further intimated that the Lady Diane Zoe had actually stolen from the palace heavily veiled on one occasion, had had tea with the Major on the terrace at Shepherd's; and that during that brief three-quarters of an hour, amidst the clatter of tea-cups on that famed terrace, an elopement had been planned that bade fair to bring about an international complication.



GOSSIP for once was correct. The die was cast. I had met, wooed, won and eloped with the lady. I was determined that all Egypt should not take her from me; and she felt the same way about it.

But we were not out of the woods yet. In reality there were no woods; but—there was a vast stretch of desert between Cairo and the Palestine border, the nearest outpost of the far-flung Turkish Empire of those days; and the question was, could my car make it?

The Great Arabian Desert is no joke. Stretching to the east, almost from the very outskirts of Cairo, lies that dreary sun-scorched waterless area of bare sand-dunes in rolling formation like the waves of the sea, interspersed at vast distances by little oases of a few palms and a spring. Scorching in the sun by day, bitterly cold at night, just a mass of bare sand-hills and valleys as far as the eye can see, stretching away into the distant horizon, and harried by winds that keep the sand in almost constant motion—blinding one's eyes and choking one's throat and creeping through one's clothing until one's entire body is covered with a mass of sand, grime and perspiration.

More than three-hundred-odd miles of that trackless desert lay between us and the nearest Turkish outpost and safety. There were no roads, only the old caravan trail, almost undefinable, over which the commerce of Egypt had been carried on the backs of camels since the days of the Pharaohs—the trail over which Joseph and his brethren, the sons of Jacob, had journeyed.

It was the only way out. I could not have taken the Lady Diane Zoe to Alexandria or Port Said and the ocean steamships, without being recognized and detained. Flight across the desert was our only hope. In that direction, provided we could escape the attack of wandering Bedouin Arabs, lay safety. There were no towns, practically no villages, be-

tween us and the border. But about one hundred miles from Cairo was the Suez Canal, and along its banks were a few little towns and villages, and Egyptian officials and small detachments of Egyptian troops and police. Also the waterway of the canal had to be crossed—at its narrowest point it was two hundred yards wide—and so we had to reach a village where a ferry service was maintained. Fortunately there was a ferry where the caravan route crossed the waterway; but there was also the telegraph to be feared. Our hope was in speed: to cross the canal before the lady's absence was discovered. That was the reason I had chosen this night, the one night in all the Mohammedan year when religious ceremonies were engaging the attention of all True Believers—when it was possible that the lady's absence would not be discovered until, I hoped, I had put the Suez Canal between us and pursuit.

Once across the canal, there were still a little more than two hundred miles of that trackless desert to be traversed; and bad as the going would be from Cairo to the Suez, it was as nothing compared to what lay beyond. I had little fear of attack from Bedouins on the first lap of the journey, for that section was policed by the desert camel patrol; my only fear was of telegraphic communication heading me off at the canal crossing; but once beyond the canal, I had one of the worst stretches of desert in the world to navigate, and had in addition to elude the observation and probable attack of innumerable Bedouin tribes and other bloodthirsty desert-dwellers.

I HAD equipped my car with the largest tires then made, hoping that with careful handling they would bear it over the treacherous shifting sands. I carried four spare wheels and tires so as to be ready to change a wheel in case of a blow-out and thus save time. My tanks were full; and ten square five-gallon cans of gasoline were in my rear apartment. I had a rifle and five hundred rounds of ammunition; a British service revolver; and I had brought along a little Colt automatic, the working of which I explained to my chosen companion in flight. We had six five-gallon cans of water, some sandwiches, biscuits, dates, pineapples, four thermos flasks filled with hot coffee, and a bottle of brandy. I had no clothes other than those I wore—my Turkish service uni-

form; my grips in the hotel back in Cairo could be forwarded later. The rear apartment of the car was packed with this conglomeration, but I had a long and arduous journey ahead of me, and could not hope to obtain either gasoline or water until I reached Hebron—that is, if the fates permitted us to reach it. It was a gamble with death.

WE made the outskirts of the city quickly, passing several British or Egyptian military patrols; there was no danger at the moment; that would come later when the lady's absence was discovered. A few miles out, and the road came to an end, but the long caravan trail stretched before us, bathed in the light of a three-quarter-full moon. The going was not so bad at first; the sand was rippled like little wavelets, but hard and fairly firm, and I was able to make around twenty miles an hour for the first couple of hours. Diane Zoe, dressed in the silken raiment of the harem, was soon shivering with the cold night air, but I wrapped my military greatcoat around her, gave her some hot coffee, and she snuggled at my side and remained quiet.

I think she slept for a couple of hours, until suddenly two camels and riders appeared silhouetted in the glare of my headlights; I had prepared for such an emergency by having her remove her diadem and veil, and wear a military service-cap I had brought along for the purpose; with my greatcoat buttoned up to her chin, and the skirts of it reaching down to her ankles, she could pass for my military servant; I aroused her immediately, and had her sit up erect and looking straight ahead. I slowed down a little as we approached the two riders, who were members of the desert camel patrol. "On the Khedive's business! How's the trail ahead?" I murmured in Arabic. They noticed the uniforms and saluted, saying: "As good as can be expected, *Bimbashi*! There's a caravan encamped about five miles ahead. Go with God!"

So—we had passed the first obstacle. From then on the caravan route gradually got worse, and the lower rims of my wheels were plowing several inches deep into the loose sand, which brought my speed down to little more than ten miles an hour. In about half an hour we passed the encamped caravan, and exchanged salutations with the camel guards. I gave Diane Zoe some more coffee, and she snuggled down again.

On through the night I drove across those yielding sands, eyes and ears alert for any threatening danger. The going was heavy, and steering with the wheel rims embedded several inches deep was tiring to my arms. About four in the morning the moon passed over the horizon, and I had only my headlights to depend on. I had been driving since ten the previous night, and I had covered eighty miles, which was not so bad, considering the surface I was driving over; twenty miles ahead lay the canal, which I did not wish to reach before daylight. Around five-thirty came the dawn; and as the light increased, I could see the waters of the canal shimmering some five miles ahead.

So far, so good. But the burning question in my mind was—had word of our flight reached the canal patrol? If it had, our jaunt was up; we were going to be questioned and detained. But the only thing to do was to keep a stiff upper lip and drive ahead. No use crossing bridges before you came to them. Awakening Diane Zoe, I gave her some coffee—then straightened up her greatcoat and belted it in at the back, replaced the cap which had fallen from her head while she slept; and cautioning her to sit erect, I drove down the sloping sandhills to the ferry-landing, as bold as brass.

LUCK favored us; the ferry was just coming in from the opposite side of the canal, the first trip of the new day. On the ferry-landing were the usual fellow-been crowd, some goats and some cattle—and a sergeant and two privates of the canal patrol. I wondered—had the telegraph been busy? But the fates were with us; I pulled up at the landing; the sergeant and his two men saluted, and all was well.

However, a difficulty arose; the ferry master was afraid his flat-decked scow could not carry the weight of the big car; it had brought nearly two dozen cattle and a couple of camels across safely, but he was doubtful. But I was adamant; I flashed official-looking papers, explained I had been on official business from the Governor of Palestine to the Khedive, and was returning, and threatened dire penalties if I were held up. The Egyptian sergeant gave the ferry-master a dressing-down—and we were on our way. The ferry crossed with my car and party and the sergeant only; the waiting crowd had to wait for the next trip. Hastily giving the sergeant and ferry-master

some *baksheesh*, I drove down the gangway on the other side of the canal.

We were across, but safety lay two hundred miles ahead. The going was terrible, and we had covered only some twenty miles when one of my tires blew out. I had carted along a six-foot length of two-by-eight timber for such an emergency. Placing this flat on the sand, I ran the car a few feet until my flat tire was over it, and then jacked her up, removed the wheel and replaced it with one of my spares. Just as I was getting behind the wheel again, I saw half a dozen Egyptian cavalymen coming up at a sharp clip over my tracks. The telegraph-wires must have buzzed too late; thank God, we were over the canal!

SAYING nothing to Diane, I opened up and we fairly flew over those dunes; the sand spurted in clouds on both sides of the car, and we were begrimed from head to foot in short order. Would my tires stand the punishment? I could easily outdistance all the cavalymen in Egypt on any half-decent road, but this was something different. I kept her going for all she was worth; she plowed through the sand, but the speedometer registered only little better than twenty; the vibration was terrific, and Diane Zoe was pale and shaken—she put her hand on my arm and begged me to go slower. I told her to look behind, however; and when she saw those pursuing soldiers, she told me to drive faster.

The pursuit was as yet about a mile in our rear, and after an hour of hell-driving through swirling clouds of sand, we still maintained our lead. But this couldn't last forever; I was expecting a tire to go any second, and when that happened, it would be all up with us. Fortunately for us, the soldiers soon realized that they couldn't overtake us; suddenly they stopped in their mad gallop, and the first thing we knew, bullets were flying unpleasantly close over our heads. I pushed Diane Zoe down on the floorboards, and stopped the car; the soldiers thought we were ready to surrender, mounted again and came toward us at a fast trot. This was what I wanted; until they opened fire on us, I couldn't very well fire at them; but now it was up to me to stop the pursuit. Grabbing my rifle, I pushed in a clip, rested the barrel across the cushioned top of the front seat, and let them have it. I fired not at the men, but at their horses, and brought two down with the first clip;

hastily inserting another clip, I opened fire again, and brought down two more; there were only two mounted men remaining, and they drew rein and stopped in their tracks. I put in another clip and shot another horse down; the remaining man hastily dismounted to save himself and help his fallen comrades, a couple of them seemingly hurt from their falls. Not wishing to leave them some forty miles out in the desert without a horse, I put up my rifle, grabbed the wheel, and drove ahead. Looking back, I saw one man riding off toward the canal, and the others making themselves as comfortable as possible, probably to await new mounts he had gone to fetch.

Diane Zoe was jubilant; she put her arms around my neck and kissed me, murmuring: "I would have killed myself before being taken back to Cairo."

I DROVE along slow and steady, not making much more than eight to ten miles an hour, for the next three hours. We had covered a little more than seventy miles from the canal when another tire blew out. Again I had to jack her up and change a wheel; I looked the others over and found them still serviceable. From time to time we had eaten biscuits and dates, but after changing this wheel, I decided we could stop a few minutes and eat something a little more substantial. So we demolished the sandwiches and a pineapple, and emptied a flask of coffee. Before going ahead I emptied six of my precious cans of gasoline into my tanks, discarded the empty cans, and also filled up her radiator with water. And well it was that I did this at that brief halt, because we had not gone more than another ten miles, before we ran into serious trouble.

Breasting a rise in the sand-hills, we ran smack into a tribe of marauding Bedouins, the thieves and cutthroats of the desert, some fifty in number. Not wishing to take any chances, I opened up and drove right through them before they had time to get over their surprise. This was probably the first time they had seen an automobile in the desert. But they galloped after us, shouting and yelling at the top of their voices, and calling on us to halt. To stop, I knew, meant being taken captive and held for ransom, perhaps death; and I drove on with all the speed I could get out of her. Again the sand swirled around and over us, thrown up by the circling wheels. To my surprise, we gradually drew away

from them, with the exception of one man mounted on a magnificent horse that gradually lessened the distance between us. After traveling at top speed through clouds of sand and grime for an hour, this man was not more than two hundred yards behind us; the rest were almost out of sight in the distance; since there was nothing else to do, I cut off the power and put on the brakes; the car swerved to a standstill; and as the fellow came on at a gallop I picked up my rifle and let him have it—through the shoulder, I think. He toppled from his horse, which immediately stopped in its tracks beside him; I grabbed the wheel and drove on.

We were still a full hundred miles from the Palestine border, and anything might happen to prevent us from reaching it. However, we had traversed two-thirds of the journey, and I was beginning to feel that we would win through. During the next eight hours we covered eighty miles; and then, when our goal was almost in sight, there came a rush of wind, and the sky itself was hidden from view with swirling choking clouds of sand. It was impossible to go ahead; a sandstorm in the Great Arabian Desert is a catastrophe that one never wants to live through a second time. We stopped, because we had to; in the space of seconds it was as black as night; we couldn't see our hands in front of our faces; we were choked, blinded, and intensely uncomfortable. We groped our way to the lee side of the car and lay down beside it, burying our heads in my greatcoat.

FOR some six hours that storm blew in fury; a hail of sand swept across the desert, burying everything in its path; we gasped for breath, and continually heaved ourselves up and out of the sand that bade fair to bury us alive. When the storm finally died down, it was night. Our car was bogged down, half buried in the sand of the desert. Our only consolation was that the Bedouins, who for all we knew were following in our tracks, had met the same disaster. The stars came out; the moon rose in all its desert glory, and cast its light over us. There was nothing I could do before daylight. And so we dug biscuits, pineapples, and coffee-flasks out of the rear sand-heap that represented the back of the car, and ate and drank; that done, I wrapped Diane Zoe in my greatcoat again; then while she slept the night away, I kept watch.

With the first signs of daylight I got busy: scrabbling the sand away from around my tank, I emptied two more cans of gasoline into it, and then stamped the empty cans flat and used them to shovel the sand from around the car; it took me two hours to make sufficient clearance to get the car away. And only just in time; over the far horizon loomed the Bedouins, again; after the storm ceased, they must have traveled all night in pursuit of us. I had opened the hood and wiped away every vestige of sand from my engine and oiled her up, thoroughly; and well it was that I was ready to get going. The Bedouins were not more than two miles away, and coming fast; the border was twenty miles in the distance. I started her off slowly, and as the engine warmed up and everything seemed in working order, I let her out. An hour went by, an hour of strenuous wheel-juggling over that clinging sand, and the border was only two miles away. Tired, weary, arms nearly jerked from out of their sockets from guiding that throbbing tortured monster which plowed through—rather more than over—the sandy surface of that hideous desert, we approached the Palestine border; beyond lay Turkish territory, and for us, safety from the vengeance of Egypt.

But beyond the border lay still another sixty back-breaking miles of desert before we reached the groves of Hebron. And those Bedouins would probably pursue us many miles across the border. But the fates were kind to the sadly harassed lovers. As we approached the border, I saw a Turkish cavalry patrol making a route march; it was a large patrol of three squadrons, three hundred men in all, their lance-points, sword-scabbards and equipment glittering in the sun. I let the horn all out, and as its unearthly roar blared across the border, the squadrons halted. The officers peered eagerly across the intervening space at the approaching car and the pursuing Bedouins in the far distance; in a few moments we were across the line, and among friends. Briefly I told them of our pursuers; a few orders were barked, and the men dismounted, drew their rifles from their saddle buckets, and took extended order along the frontier. Unaware of the change in the situation, the Bedouins came on at the gallop; when they were only fifty yards from the line an order rang out and the rifles blazed; one-third of them bit the dust, and the remainder drew rein, turned and gal-

loped back as fast as they had come, yelling to Allah for vengeance.

We had made it; we were safe! Covered with grime and perspiration as we were, we certainly looked a sight. But Diane Zoe threw her arms around me and kissed me before all the squadrons. And in command of the three squadrons was Major Murad Bey, a Turkish officer and gentleman whom I had known in Constantinople. A few words of conversation and congratulation, and seeing that I was nearly all in, the Major detailed one of his lieutenants to drive the car for me over the sixty-odd desert miles to Hebron.

Arriving in Hebron, we cleaned up at the inn and had a meal; and feeling all right by this time, I decided to drive on the remaining twenty-five miles to El Kuds, the Holy City of Jerusalem. Arriving there just before sunset, we put up at the Grand Hotel, bathed and obtained fresh clothing, dined, and called on the Governor to pay our respects. In the morning we took the train to Jaffa, caught a Khedivial liner, and were on our way to Constantinople the same day.

Arriving in Stamboul, the Lady Diane Zoe and I were married after the proverbial feasting according to Mohammedan rites. I was banqueted by the officers of the Headquarters General Staff. And being in the Sultan's service, and my wife being a descendant of the ancient emperors, at the next levee he conferred on the Lady Diane Zoe the Imperial Order of the Chefakat.

KIPLING once wrote, "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." But in this instance marriage of East and West proved a lasting success. Diane Zoe was adaptable, intelligent, witty and very wise, as well as being a remarkably beautiful woman. In a few years she was the equal of any Western-born woman, speaking fluently seven languages; she played the piano, was a wonderful dancer, could ride, shoot, swim and drive a car with the best of them. During the World War she drove an ambulance in the British Service, and accompanied me to the United States as a member of the British War Mission.

To my deep and lasting regret I lost her in 1927. As a Britisher, a soldier of fortune, a newspaper man, a man of the world, and I hope a gentleman, I say hats off to the memory of the greatest and truest wife and pal that any man ever had. Kismet!



Saved by

The attaché of a foreign embassy comes close to losing his life on a Mexican battlefield.

WHILE on a mission for the German Ambassador to Mexico, for whom I served in the capacity of special observer, I had uncovered a plot directed against President Madero, and had sent an open telegram to General Angeles to tell him of my discovery. Though this wire had almost cost me my life, my warning went unheeded, and President Madero had been assassinated two months later.

The whole of Mexico had flared up in revolution with Madero's passing. Anxious to discover which way the wind might be blowing, the Ambassador sent me to Chihuahua with special orders to make contact with Pancho Villa, who had remained loyal to Madero's party. Unable to find him, I applied to Colonel José Lopez, then recruiting men for Villa's rapidly growing army. He granted my request, and asked me to come with him on his march toward Ciudad Juárez. I accepted gladly, though Lopez' looks and manners were far from pleasant.

I had been with him for a week when we arrived at Carrizal, a whistling-post in the desert some hundred miles south of the border city. Rumors reached us there that Villa was somewhere to the northeast, so I left early one morning to find him.

Three Americans were in camp when I returned from a futile search. Though I had failed to get in touch with Villa, I had discovered a small force of the rebels right on the edge of our camp.

Colonel Lopez, who thought that the Reds—*los Colorados*, as Orozco's men were called—were still well north of Villa Ahumada, had failed to post guards. This accounted for the fact that the Americans had walked into Carrizal unnoticed. Only one of them knew a few words of Spanish, and neither Lopez nor Gill Barrazas, his second in command, spoke English.

"Capitán Estade," Lopez called to me as I dismounted, "will you please act as interpreter."

I wanted to tell him of my discovery, but he gave me no opening.

"These three gringos barged in on us an hour ago," he added impatiently. "As far as I can make out, they claim to be reporters or photographers, but *válgame dios*, if that's the case, why do they wear arms? They are Orozco spies, and I'm going to shoot them!"

Now, the three Americans looked *muy simpático* to me as I sized them up. They seemed to realize that they were in a tight spot—all they needed to do was to look at Lopez. Next to Fierro and Burunda, whom I met later, he was the most bloodthirsty of Villa's followers. Ever since joining him, I had felt loathing mingled with fear of him.

Disregarding their predicament, the Americans were joking as I stepped closer. "Gosh Almighty," I heard the oldest of the trio say, "if he isn't the toughest-looking guy I ever did see, Wallie. He's my idea of the perfect desperado."

The young man addressed as Wallie smiled, showing even white teeth in a sun-bronzed face.

"That one is a *gachupín*," Barrazas hazarded, pointing at Wallie. "Those Spaniards are as lousy and tricky as the devil."

"Gentlemen," I said, giving them my name, "Colonel Lopez thinks that you are spies. It's his pleasure to shoot them when caught. Since I don't share his opinion, I'll do my level best to get you off. But why in thunder did you come?"

FROM their faces the smiles faded. They handed me cards, from which I gathered that two, Lem and Wallie, were newspaper reporters, while the third was an El Paso news-photographer. I recall only Wallie's full name, because I have a memento of his.

"We were told that we'd find Villa near here," Wallie said. "So we boarded a train in Juarez, but got kicked off at Ahumada. Darn it all, we had paid those birds enough to take us all the way to Mexico City. We hoofed it nine miles through deep sand, and here we are—or aren't we?"

the Enemy

By ODO B. STADE



I couldn't help laughing; Wallie's humor infected me. "Personally, I'd say you aren't, unless you don't know a tough spot when you see it. Now, while I rack my brains, keep on talking to me. As long as you do, Lopez won't shoot you."

They were fools to have come; so was I, for that matter. Revolutions aren't Sunday-school picnics. What made it worse was that only Lem and the photographer had passports; Wallie claimed to have left his in an El Paso hotel.

"When we discovered that Villa had crossed over into Mexico, we high-tailed right after him," Wallie informed me. "He gave us the slip as nice as can be, and we'd been watching him for days."

"We're hunting for Villa ourselves," I told them in turn. There was a bare chance that I might be able to get them out of Mexico; I meant to take it. I'd have to work fast. Watching Lopez out of the corner of my eye, I saw him toying with the handles of his two pistols.

"Won't you ever get done with your jabbering?" he shouted at me.

"Colonel," I said calmly, though I didn't feel that way, "you haven't given me a chance to find out all about them, and I made a discovery a while back. Better wait with your gun-play, or it will bring the Colorados down on us."

I told him what I had seen. "They are camped near the Ojo de Carrizal, and outnumber us two to one."

Barrazas jumped as if he had sat down on a tarantula, and a soft whistle broke from Lopez' heavy lips. When he looked at me, I read distrust in his eyes. But he slid the revolvers back into the holsters, which hung low on his thighs.

"Pablo," he called to one of his men, "cut across that hill, take a good look, and tell me what you see. And be quick about it! If you as much as show your head to them, I'll shoot it off—unless the Colorados get you first."

Barrazas had busied himself with his saddlebags. He was digging out more bandoliers, though he was loaded down to capacity. Lopez now followed suit, bawling orders to his men.

When all was ready, he returned to us. He resembled an ape, what with the long growth of sparse hair on his unshaven face, and his ambling gait. His hairy hands rested on the butts of his pistols.

"Well, what about them?" he asked. "I might as well shoot those fellows before we leave."

Should I play with fate once more? If I came out openly in defense of the trio, he would shoot me down with them. One life more or less did not count with him. I was an *estranjero*—a foreigner; and Lopez shared the distrust of all Mexicans of his kind toward strangers. "Shoot first, and ask questions afterward," was his favorite saying. A prickly feeling ran up and down my spine; I was faced with a real crisis without knowing what to do. To see the three Americans shot was out of the question. On the other hand, it seemed almost hopeless to defend them: I might get Lopez, but Barrazas would be certain to pot me in turn.

THERE is no telling what might have happened. Providentially, just then, the soldier sent a few minutes ago came tearing back, waving his sombrero.

Suddenly an idea flashed into my head.

"*Mi coronel*," I said, on seeing Lopez draw his pistols, "leave those gringos to me. Your shots will alarm the Colorados, and if you wish to defeat them, you can do so only by surprise."

Saying this, I looked steadily into his still distrustful eyes. "*Buena*," he answered slowly. "I'll do as you say; but don't bungle the job. When I get back, I want to see two dead gringos and one thoroughly dead Spaniard. And to make sure that you'll stick around, we'll take your horse along."

A minute later he was riding at the head of his column toward the hill behind which the still unsuspecting followers of Pascual Orozco were camping. The small force was spread out fan-wise—Lopez riding on the right flank, while Barrazas led the tip of the other.

"Let's hike, fellows!" I shouted, breaking into a sharp run. We made good progress for a while, despite the ankle-deep sand. Upon stopping for breath, I noticed that Lopez and his men had crested the hill, while back of us the few scattered adobe houses and the ugly station building of Carrizal seemed still close enough to touch. The next few minutes would decide our fate. The crash of a salvo cut into my thoughts; if Lopez succeeded, we could not hope to escape. I voiced this opinion while sprinting forward again. But the intense heat, choking dust and sand soon slowed us down to only a fast walk.

Meanwhile a regular battle was in progress; heavy rifle-fire told me that Lopez had met with stiff opposition. Our hopes rose; and when we saw the sun dip behind the distant Sierra de la Escandida, we felt that we might have a chance—a gambling chance at least. We made for the railroad to get out of the sand; and jumping from tie to tie, we managed better speed in spite of the still intense heat. A faint wind began to stir with the coming of darkness, but it failed to bring relief. Our throats were parched; in our hurry to get away, we had forgotten to take along water. Our faces were caked with sweat and sand, and we must have lost pounds, but we hadn't lost our humor. At least Wallie's seemed unimpaired. He drew tantalizing word-pictures of foaming schooners of cold beer. I surmised later that he realized his predicament even more keenly than did the others. But whatever the cause, he made us laugh with him, and nothing heartens sinking spirits so much as loud infectious laughter.

OUR laughter was punctuated by occasional shooting to the south of us. The shots sounded muffled, like pebbles thrown onto a tightly stretched tarpaulin. Lopez' surprise had not come off, and he and his men were fighting for their lives. Weeks later, I heard that only some three or four of his men escaped, and that Lopez and Barrazas had been killed. But we did not know that then.

Toward midnight we found a deserted section hut, built of old ties; a miniature fortress in which we could hope to make a good stand. We took new ties from a pile near by, and barricaded the door, which had been torn off its hinges. We slaked our thirst with the brackish water from the huge tank, then huddled together in the far corner, because the

night had suddenly turned very cold. Outside, the wind was rising; driven sand hissed past with an eerie sound, and somewhere in the distance coyotes were howling at the rising moon. The night seemed endless as we sat listening for sound of pursuit. At last we slept, waking bleary-eyed and stiff early the next morning. Not a soul was to be seen as we stepped out of the shelter. After filling some bottles with water, we resumed our march on aching feet.

The three Americans caught a train toward late evening at Lucera. They urged me to come along, to get out of Mexico, but I had my mission, and bade them good-by. Three days later, I was able to present my papers to Villa.

TEN years afterward, I met Wallie again; this time in Hollywood, California. I recognized him at once, though he was heavier. But he had the same ready smile, the same sparkling, amused eyes, which turned serious for a moment when I said, "Hello, Carrizal!" to him.

"My, it's good to see you!" he shouted. "But why didn't you write to me?" he asked in the next breath, while holding my hand in a tight grasp. "When I didn't hear from you, I figured you'd got killed. Believe me, I've often thought back to that day!"

We had lunch together, and talked about Mexico and the revolution. Invariably we came back to our day of narrow escape near Carrizal, though I tried hard to change the topic. Finally I managed to ask him what he was doing. He laughed. "Oh, I've got a job writing for the movies. You see, I've written a lot of stories about Mexico, and I illustrated them myself. You'll see. I'll send you a copy of my book if you give me your address."

And he sent it the following day: "The Little Tigress; Tales out of the Dust of Mexico—with drawings from a field sketch-book," by Wallace Smith.

He had written on the fly-leaf:

FOR SEÑOR ODO STADE—

who thoughtfully refrained from shooting me at Carrizal—

Wallace Smith.

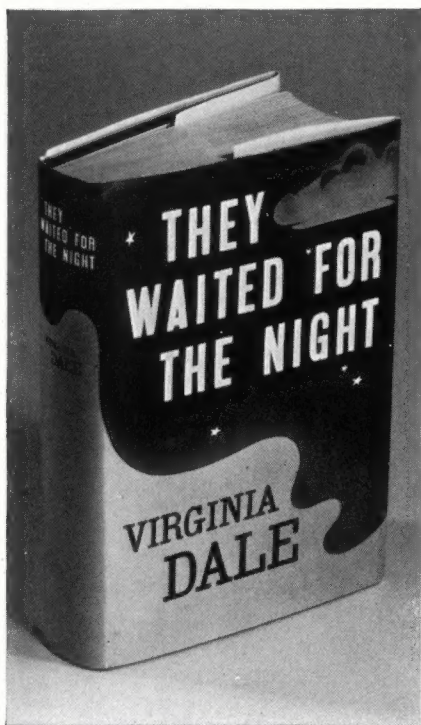
*Hollywood,
Ten years later.*

Somehow I like to take it down now and then, not because of the inscription, but because it recalls a day long ago when I interfered to save the lives of three adventure-bent gringos.

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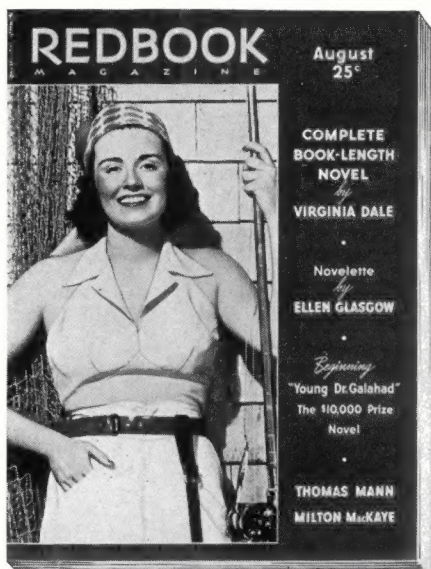
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BUSINESS GIRL—1938 MODEL—Office manager Olive Tucker keeps disarmingly calm despite nerve-nagging phones, buzzers, interviews. "If anyone needs healthy nerves, I do," Miss Tucker

smiles. "Camels never upset my nerves." Later—to the roof gym for a quick work-out. Shower—rub—a Camel—and she's off again! Tired? Miss Tucker's answer: "Camels give my energy a refreshing 'lift.'"

Cigarettes may *look* alike—but what an appealing difference there is in Camels!

You'll be interested to read what Miss Tucker, successful young office manager, said to Miss MacGregor about the difference between Camels and other cigarettes (at right).

"Olive, do you always serve Camels because you feel that there's a big difference between Camels and other cigarettes?"



MISS TUCKER entertains *thoughtfully!* There are lots of Camels around. Miss Tucker says: "Camels are the favorite with my guests and are delightful for topping off a meal. During and after dining, I smoke Camels 'for digestion's sake.' Camels set me right!"

"I'm very glad you've brought that question up, Helen. I've tried as many kinds of cigarettes as most people, I guess, and I'm amazed at how *different* Camels are. Camels are extra-mild—they never bother my throat. And Camels taste good, yet never leave that 'cigaretty' after-taste. In so many ways, Camels *agree* with me."



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